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Hollywood without Make-Up



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Hollywood without Make-Up

by **PETE MARTIN**

With a Foreword by
NUNNALLY JOHNSON

and an Afterword by
JACK ALEXANDER

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Foreword

These stories about Hollywood were written by a very unfashionable writer. Pete Martin is as *démodé* in this book as a New York sports columnist who was not cutting up old touches in Toots Shor's last night. And I'll tell you why.

The way to write about Hollywood and Hollywoodians, the smart way, was established some twenty or twenty-five years ago, probably by the first embittered failure returning East to lick his wounds and work out his alibi. Now as all men know, nothing brings out the razor edge of wit in a writer like a failure to get to first base, and thus the pattern may have been set. In time it became a formula so easy to copy, so difficult to resist, so comforting to the ego in all its implications, that it remains today the official standard style, recognized and used by all the better book- magazine- and newspaper-writers.

Its basic note is aloof amusement. (The years and constant repetition have, of course, brought to it a certain polish and refinement, as well as a sort of celluloid-collar dignity that often passes with journalistic historians as suaveness.) Fundamentally one simply observes. One sighs occasionally, one smiles, one shrugs. One knows, of course, better, but then what merest child of the East does not! The difference, really, between the East and that droll region of the movies!

In Hollywood, for instance, writers or actors getting \$500 a week are never permitted to associate with those getting \$5,000 a week, any more than those getting \$50,000 a week are allowed to have anything to do with those getting \$500,000 a week.

In the East, on the other hand, where social, economic, and professional lines are unheard of, it is nothing, of course, to find the chief editorial writer of a great New York newspaper hanging out night after night with the Long Island City district men, no matter how boring they may be to him, while a dinner party in the publisher's East Sixty-sixth Street apartment is little less than a cross-section of his paper's personnel, with tiresome, stupid, and offensive representatives from every department.

In Hollywood, again, the higher executives, or producers, are without exception illiterate, lascivious, crude, loud, arrogant, dishonest, and laughingly ignorant of their own business, and their success in building their industry to its present world preeminence is due solely to fifty years of solid, unbroken, blind luck.

In the East, obviously, the historian is accustomed only to quiet, softly spoken, faintly smiling tycoons, all of whom have been reared gently and soundly grounded in the arts and humanities, men who would stiffen instantly and turn white with indignation at the slightest hint that they would infringe a patent or cop a little feel in the vestibule.

Thus when a Hollywood writer or actor moves into a fine home it is not because he likes and can afford a fine home, but because he is at bottom a snob and just cannot help showing off. By way of contrast, when an Easterner hits the jackpot and finds himself really loaded, he would no more think of moving out of his furnished room and into a clean apartment further uptown than he would think of accepting an invitation to lunch at the Colony. That's why so many fabulously successful Easterners still live in scabby flats over near the North River and eat at Mike's Bar and Grill.

And so in other particulars of the Hollywood formula. The actor or writer there who owns a swimming pool has no actual need, liking, or background for it but is simply following a tiresome local fad. (The Easterner who owns one genuinely likes the cheerful convenience and privacy of this healthful luxury, in addition to which it is such a joy to the kiddies on a hot afternoon.) The movie actor who interests himself in politics or other affairs of his govern-

ment is an empty-headed mummer who should be reminded that his role is that of entertainer, not thinker. (In the East, every last voter studies the issues thoroughly, weighs the arguments carefully, takes all of the intangibles into consideration, and never utters one word until he has thought the whole situation out to a cool, calm, intelligent conclusion.) The Hollywoodian who finds himself at last able to afford his taste for paintings of value and merit, whose walls are hung with such works of the masters as he can get, is really asking for the laugh. What nonsense!

From time immemorial (circa 1925) this has been the stylish approach to Hollywood and its citizens. It's an approach that gives happiness to everybody. It puts those rich Hollywood bastards in their place, it is a clear explanation to any intelligent person why the historian himself could not be expected to be out there sharing in the gravy on such distasteful terms, and it assures all others who might be concerned that the whole business is just a great big crooked roulette wheel and therefore no reflection on their own capacities.

Why Martin doesn't avail himself of this familiar and popular routine I have no idea. He knows as well as any other writer that it's about a thousand percent easier to slap these things off with the old stencil than to write straight from the heart every time, but that's the way he does it nevertheless. No prejudices at all, apparently.

An enormous, amiable man, pleased to sit down and talk with anybody on any subject, he is at the same time a sharp and observant reporter. Hollywoodians are not his only subjects. For many years he has been the Saturday Evening Post's most prolific article writer, roving the nation and examining all kinds of celebrities from war heroes to distinguished operators in the manufacturing game. But Hollywood, I believe, is his favorite field.

As a fan he goes way back. He claims to have seen the first two-reeler, Enoch Arden. He never missed an installment of *The Million Dollar Mystery*. Like every other red-blooded boy of his

generation, he fell in love with Alice Joyce. Today he loves his wife and children—but oh, you Greer Garson and Ingrid Bergman!

A celebrity being interviewed is a pretty transparent object. Either he is just being himself, with a hell of an effort, or he is really a Character. It's not an enviable position, being scrutinized by an expert, but Martin seems to note these pathetic histrionics less with amusement than with sympathy.

That, perhaps, is how he differs most from other historians and biographers. "I've got to like the people I write about," he explains. "If I don't like them, if I think they're phonies or tiresome or useless, I can't get very much interested in them. A lot of writers jump with joy when they hit on a subject they can ride or have fun with one way or another, but not me. I like for my people to look good. I don't want my readers asking themselves why I'm wasting my time on some jerk that I don't care for."

This, in a day of caustic "profiles" and juvenile irony, is obviously not the fashionable approach, but it has resulted here in some of the truest and fairest stories about Hollywood and Hollywoodians that have ever been published.

—NUNNALLY JOHNSON

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Hollywood without Make-Up

1. *They Threw the Lions to Me*

The title of this book seems to me to need a fuller explanation. What it really means is Hollywood Without Greasepaint. I hope it cuts *that* deep at least! There's no point in pretending that I'm a reportorial vivisectionist; that I've caught the place naked of the pancake, peach-fuzz or golden-glow make-up it wears on the street, downing its cocktails, or while it tucks away its simple luncheon of cracked crab and avocado.

There's nothing much to covering the Hollywood beat. There's nothing much to covering it, that is, *if* you're lucky enough to have behind you a magazine whose circulation hovers around the four million mark and if you're blessed with an editor named Ben Hibbs who can look at your stuff and tell at a glance whether it has any merit or whether (as he so considerately puts it), "It's not quite up to your best," meaning "I'm sorry, but it stinks!"

The way he says it makes you feel that you're a fine writer even when he's turning thumbs down on you. He's gifted that way.

It also helps to have a managing editor named Bob Fuoss, who wields a knowing blue pencil and who tosses out such suggestions as, "Why don't you get Perc Westmore to make you up as three other guys and write about how it feels," or "Why not pick a gal out of a Hollywood drive-in and take her to a studio and have her made beautiful by five o'clock the same day?"

An expense account is a nice thing to have around, too. But the main thing is that solidly impressive four million circulation looming up over my shoulder. I've never worked for the Main Line

News (Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, circulation 7,000) or the Charlottesville Daily Progress (Charlottesville, Virginia, circulation 7,500). But somehow I don't think the movie studios would be quite so quick to arrange a two-hour session for me with Ingrid Bergman in her Waldorf suite if I visited Hollywood representing either of those two worthy publications.

I am constantly asked, "How do you get your Hollywood ideas?" The temptation is to crib a quip a fiction writer friend of mine got off when asked by a burbler at a literary tea, "Where do you get your plots?" Quite seriously he told her, "Frankly, madam, I steal them."

I get my subjects for Hollywood stories in two ways. I think them up myself and they're suggested to me. The trick is to stall off ideas for stories about Hollywood rather than to get them. There are twice as many Hollywood stories to write as time to write them in. New personalities, new ideas, new technical improvements come along faster than they can be adequately covered, although there are a number of men and women who cover the ones they tackle more than adequately.

When I first hit the Hollywood trail I had trouble selling the studio publicity folk the notion that my primary function there was not to help them promote their next big, multimillion dollar film. It wasn't easy to put across the notion that I was just as interested in off-the-beaten-path movie angles as I was in the Leo McCareys or the Gregory Pecks. Sometimes it took a couple of hours of steady talking to persuade those with whom I came in contact that I was looking for human interest material rather than big names.

At the moment at least, my personal conviction is that writing about Hollywood *away* from it is the best way to do it. I cram my notebooks with information during trips there, then go back East to write. If, by staying there too long, a Hollywood reporter gets so used to his assignment that he becomes bored by it or blasé about it, or even embittered about it, I don't see how he can pass along to his readers any of the excitement the place engenders. Visiting it only

at intervals tends to keep it a fresh and zestful experience for both a chronicler and those who read what he chronicles.

Not that all a visitor picks up in the place is fresh and zestful. I try to close my nostrils to the gossip, and malicious scandal that swirls down Coldwater and Benedict Canyon like an evil-smelling wind to greet me when I step off a train or a plane, my notebook and pencil poised. Any minute I expect to encounter a volunteer leg-man who will lead me to one side and ask me if I've heard about the blazing affair between C. Aubrey Smith and Margaret O'Brien!

When it comes to doing itself in, Hollywood is its own best hatchetman. No malodorous tale I've ever listened to (or read) away from there compares in unfragrance with the stories I've listened to those who live and work there spout about their fellow laborers in the celluloid vineyard.

This kind of character assassination may stem from jealousy. It may be a kind of mental diarrhea peculiar to those who dwell on the disgruntled fringes of the movie colony. Whatever it is, it's a pain in the neck to me. I like to form my own conclusions about people on whom I'm trying to do a job. I don't like having my mind poisoned in advance.

And while I'm leveling about my job, I have a confession to make.

It has been my habit to complain that Hollywood breeds in me the feeling of being constantly under pressure while I'm there. Even the desk drawers of those who have lived there and worked there long enough to become acclimatized are jam-packed and running over with ulcer remedies and anti-acid nostrums and when I begin to feel myself caught in the movie duck press, my instinct is to run like hell before my own consumption of anti-acid remedies jumps from one bottle a day to two.

I have been known to beef that arriving in Hollywood to gather material for articles is like lugging a bagful of diamonds (each one roughly the size of the Hope or the Kohinoor) through a dark alley in the Casbah where diamond thieves lurk under each dark archway. The pieces a Hollywood reporter writes result in publicity for those they write about. To Hollywood, publicity is worth its weight in

diamonds and the town is crowded with publicity workers who are paid to do nothing but snaffle double handfuls of the same.

I have been guilty of bellyaching that no matter how many filled notebooks I take home with me or no matter how I knock myself out to finish my chores and get away before my duodenum cracks up, to those who've never been put through the wringer of covering the Holloywood beat it seems the kind of job for which a man ought to be ashamed to accept pay.

As my friend Bob Yoder succinctly puts it, "People prefer to believe that a Hollywood reporter spends his time lolling around champagne-filled swimming pools with starlets of transcending beauty and retarded morals." This supposition (as lovely as it is) is far from being true. But I am willing to admit regardless of previous protestations on my part that the job is an interesting one—and at times—even fascinating.

No matter how thin it slices you, to quote Yoder again, the movie city "ain't Siberia!"

2. *Beautiful Dames Are a Million Dollars a Dozen*

When it comes to writing about women stars, I am no gay boulevardier of the press with a suave twinkle in my typewriter and a knowledgeable air. My No. 1 fault as an objective reporter is that much of the time I get much too steamed up over the people I write about. I have to sweat not to let myself get so enthusiastic that my stuff ends up with the whipped cream texture of a fan magazine rave.

It's especially hard for me to keep my appraisals wryly casual and discerning when I'm casing a Hollywood dame. I've never been much good at the arrogantly condescending, superior-intellect kind of writing that is only concerned with putting the blast on whoever the unlucky subject happens to be. I'm especially bad at it when that subject happens to be Susan Smith instead of Joe Doakes.

Once I'm up at bat eyeing Susan Smith's curves—both mental and physical—I get along reasonably well. But quite often I have the uneasy feeling that the feminine minds I'm trying to peer into are a lot nimbler than mine; which is a pretty disconcerting thing to a man whose business is being a mental peeping Tom. In addition, I was nurtured on such lavender-and-old-lace notions as "no gentleman strikes a lady, suh, no matteh what the provocation!" and "when you're playing tennis with a girl, son, hit the ball where she can reach it."

It worries me no little when (as they occasionally do) the victims

of my researches write or wire me, "I liked that piece you did on me." A nagging voice tells me that if I'd done the kind of get-beneath-the-surface-and-find-out-what-really-makes-her-tick job I should have done, the only notes or telegrams I'd get would be from my victim's lawyer.

Moreover such thank-you notes can and do have domestic reverberations. When such a missive from Greer Garson reached my desk, I mentioned it to my teen-age daughter. She looked at me skeptically. I could see she thought "Daddy is lying in his teeth." That a man she regarded as practically senile should be claiming to be corresponding with a woman who could have Ronald Coleman and Walter Pidgeon at her feet by raising her little finger was obviously a lot of nonsense.

I was driven to taking the note from Miss Garson home with me to prove I was no Ananias. It was a nice note, and when my daughter read it, her manner changed. Instead of thinking of me as a hardening of the arteries case, I found her looking at me as if I were a man of no principles, just about to sneak out of the place with a packed suitcase to spend the rest of his life playing house with a succession of movie hours.

Frowning at me, she asked accusingly, "What about Mommy?" Her assumption that a friendly note from La Garson meant that the lady had succumbed to my middle-aged charms was, beyond doubt, the most flattering remark ever addressed to me.

It did me small good to point out to her that Greer Garson's morals are above reproach, so much so that outsiders interested in raising the movie's moral tone delight to cite her as a case in point. They remind one and all that her screen appearances have been marked by wifely virtue, restrained charm—even a touch of implied spirituality—and that despite these things she is an ace film drawing card. If virtue packs in the crowds, such moralists argue, why give the public vice, gilded or otherwise?

A Hollywood psychologist—there are plenty of this breed, mostly self-appointed—would probably reply that Greer's drawing power doesn't depend solely on the public's appetite for righteousness. He

would state that first of all she is an excellent actress, capable of expressing happiness without flashing her dental work, and sadness without indulging in pretzel-shaped facial contortions. Then he would bring up his clincher. Greer is a double-threat star who can arouse the old "it-might-have-been" feeling in both men and women . . . and with equal virulence.

Take the men first. Such high-powered morsels as Betty Grable, Hedy Lamarr and Rita Hayworth can make the lads dissatisfied with their lot, but subconsciously they are aware that they wouldn't quite know how to handle such feminine voltage even if it were wired into their own homes. Instinctively, however, a male beholder recognizes in Garson the girl he might have married, if only—

As for the women fans, Greer's pictured braveness under adversity and the adoration she inspires in her screen husbands are qualities any woman is sure she possesses if the truth were only known. Watching Greer she has the satisfaction of seeing her own virtues ideally portrayed on the screen, minus the erosion of dishwashing and diaper laundering. Such "audience identification" is the most potent force an actress can have working for her. But Greer has other assets. Her rivals for the cinema prestige crown must think that she has more of them than any one woman should have.

A fantastic amount of energy hums away inside her body, although she occasionally feels called upon to stoke it with vitamins, which she munches like popcorn or has administered hypodermically. She is beset by a driving physiological and psychological need for work. An old back injury hurts her when she's idle; she forgets it when she's working. Her memory is a photographic plate; she never blows a line before the camera. Her face is a mobile instrument over which moods chase each other at command. For the most part, her body has been hidden by the costumers, but it is eminently satisfactory. Her mind is so nimble that it frightened the daylights out of at least one swain who came to woo her—before her marriage—and fled home afterward to nurse a bruised ego. Her mane of extremely alive burnt-orange hair is just what the Techni-

color experts would have ordered for her, if they had been good fairies gathered around her cradle.

Some of those who try to analyze her appeal trundle out the cumbersome phrase "the personification of all true womanhood" to explain it. Not only is this so noble as to make her seem forbid-
dingly saintlike, it is misleadingly oversimplified. Just being "true womanhood" crammed into a neat package wouldn't break records at the Radio City Music Hall or send husbands out of a cinema determined to be sweeter to the little woman their vows have bound them to, and even to tell her occasionally that they still find her desirable.

One director who worked with Greer says of her that she is a "thoroughbred it would be fun to make love to." The description is apt. Along with Hollywood sweater girls, during the war she was voted "the woman we'd like to spend the rest of our lives in the nose of a bomber with." No sarong Circe, she gets almost as many requests for pinup art as do leggier stars. But, unlike such bosomy buds, she has run up the most outsized collection of weighty honors ever accumulated in cinema history.

On the Garson list are the American Radium Society's presentation of the Janeway medal for her portrayal of Madame Curie; firsts on the annual Gallup poll of 55,000,000 moviegoers for two consecutive years, and the English picturegoer award for three consecutive years. She won two annual box-office awards based on a poll of film critics, theater exhibitors and National Screen Council members.

In addition to this assortment of kudos, she has had her footprints frozen in concrete before Grauman's Chinese Theater near a special bronze plaque to commemorate the occasion. Most impressive of all, she was nominated for the annual Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' award for seven consecutive years. A special kind of rose has been called the Mrs. Miniver in her honor. A wax effigy of her has been shown in Madame Tussaud's London Waxworks.

On the practical side, nine of the first eleven pictures she made have been premiered at the world's largest movie theater, Radio City

Music Hall, where they have played a total of sixty-four weeks, a record never equaled by any other star. Random Harvest, with an eleven-week run, held the Music Hall record, breaking another Garson record, the ten-week run stacked up by Mrs. Miniver. Other stars pull mail from bobby-soxers; from women who want to mother them or adopt them; from lovesick young men who want "one of those poses of you in an evening dress"; and from servicemen who collect examples of the body beautiful for barracks walls and ask, "How about a date sometime, huh?" Greer pulls in all these and more. The "more" being communications from serious-minded business and professional men who have no amorous ax to grind and who only want to tell her that to them she means something fine and satisfying. They don't want to step out with her, but merely to sit with her in front of a glowing fire and indulge in a little warm, human companionship.

Part of her public carries Greer's face around inside their heads, where, at intervals, it flashes on and off on a mental screen. She is constantly hearing from people who are sure they have seen her in odd parts of the globe where she couldn't possibly have been because she was elsewhere at the same moment. One such letter read, "I saw you in Alabama in a restaurant last year." Weary of pointing out to her fans that they must have made a mistake, Greer didn't bother to correct that one, but she couldn't resist the temptation to reply, "I hope I was in reputable company." A Dublin paper reported that she was attending an opening of one of her pictures at a theater there, when she was busy at Culver City, California, 6000 miles away.

Although she is generally thought of as being English, she is really Irish. She was born in County Down, in the north of Ireland. Her burnt-orange hair is genuinely red—annoyingly so to some of her contemporaries.

While her name sounds like something thought up by a num-erologist, it is really hers. "Greer" is a contraction of her mother's maiden name, MacGregor.

While still a toddler she made her first appearance on the stage

in an amateur theatrical. Intoxicated with applause, she was dragged from the stage protesting her departure bitterly. It was then that she was bitten by the stage bug. She has never got over it. Packed away to school with throat lozenges on her tongue, she was warned not to talk to anyone along the way—"If you open your mouth you might pick up a germ." Once there, she studied with the feverish concentration of a small girl racing to learn all there was to know in half the time other small girls took to do it.

The early death of her father made things precarious for the Garsons. Greer lived in fear that the privilege of going to school might be snatched away from her, and she didn't feel well endowed for such an emergency. She had chronic bronchitis, and freckles all over, even on her legs. She was gangling, pallid and subject to spells of faintness. But her precocity exhausted the available supply of prizes, and her teachers had to buy others for her out of their own pockets. Discussing her uncertain childhood, she said, "Other children asked me, 'Why is your hair rusty? Did your mother leave you out all night?'" As a moppet, she had dreams in which her hair was raven-hued. She thought no one would ever want to marry her if it was still red when she woke up.

She won one scholarship at the county school, and another one, when she was sixteen, that paid her way through the University of London. There she accomplished what many American girls have done under the pressure of speeded-up wartime courses; she finished a four-year course in three. When Greer did it, and with honors, it was supposed to indicate sheer genius or the certainty of a nervous breakdown. She didn't have a breakdown.

Despite throat lozenges, genteel poverty and brain-wracking study, she clung to her determination to be an actress. Both her grandmother and her mother firmly steered her toward teaching as a profession. As her grandmother put it, snapping her lips together into a straight line, "No granddaughter of mine will ever lift her skirts on the stage."

"I resisted their urging to become a teacher," Greer said, "and my family began to hope I would be a writer. They went on the theory

that the original investment was attractively small—just a pad of paper and a few pencils.”

Greer topped off her University of London course with a year's postgraduate work at Grenoble, in France. Back in London she took a job as head of market research for an advertising firm but she was still incurably stage-struck and, shucking two secretaries, two telephones and a decent enough ten-pound weekly salary, plunged into a theatrical puddle called The Birmingham Repertory Theater. She was determined that hard work would make her at least a middle-sized frog in it.

In Birmingham she showed a gift for dialect—American, French, Jewish: “You name it; I'll do it.”—and collected a scrapbook of favorable provincial notices. But when she trotted those notices around London, no producer would see her. She gave the agate-eyed young women in the anterooms all she had in the way of winsomeness and charm but it was strictly “closed sesame” with the lady watchdogs. Setting her jaw, Greer retreated temporarily to the Regent Park Open Air Theater to realign her forces before badgering producers once more.

Next time she made the rounds she was clad in a *femme-fatale* costume of clinging black, and twirled a black picture hat dangling at the end of long black ribbons. The effect gave the producers' secretaries something to think about, but since no prospective employer was brash enough to expose himself to it, her costume laid an egg.

Even if her university degree opened no inner sanctum for her, the fact that she had one made it possible for her to load up with hearty food at the Women's University Club. One evening she was having dinner there alone and, having spent all of her savings, was studying the university appointments' lists, looking for a job. Authoress Sylvia—The Hounds of Spring—Thompson saw her there, black *femme-fatale* dress, picture hat, flaming hair, green eyes, white skin and all. Viewing her, Miss Thompson thought she was seeing a visting actress of no small reputation. Approaching Greer's table,

she said, "I've been looking at you, and you look like the right girl to play the lead in a play I've just written."

Greer drew upon all of the acting ability she had been storing away at Birmingham and in Regent Park, and casually said, "I have two or three other productions in mind, but I'll tell you whether or not I'm interested."

Laurence Olivier had already been cast as the star of the Thompson play, and when the authoress took Greer to see the theatrical manager who was staging the production, Greer read her part to Olivier. Afterward, shaking with nervousness, she sat and listened to the manager and Olivier argue about her ability in the adjoining office. Olivier won the debate and Greer got the part. She also got Olivier's pajamas. The ones she was supposed to wear in the show failed to show up, and she walked out on the stage in his. So voluminous were they that they fell in accordion folds about her. But she played the part of an American girl so convincingly that both audience and critics spoke of her afterward as an "American find."

In rapid succession, Greer played every kind of role. Clad in little more than a London fog, she played a curvy native girl in Shaw's *Too True to be Good*. In a Noel Coward theatrical hanky-panky called *Mademoiselle*, and such other dramatic meringues as *Vintage Wine* and *Accent on Youth*, she was very gay, too-too-sophisticated and naughty. This sort of thing kept on for two years, during which time her avidness for work gave her only two weeks' vacation. Envious—and lazier—coworkers fell into the habit of calling her *Ca-Reer Garson*, a label that afterward followed her to Hollywood, where apparently, as in London, a determination to get ahead is a reprehensible quality—unless you possess it yourself.

Students of Garsoniana know what happened next. Fate in the shape of Louis B. Mayer, head of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, stepped into the Garson life. In London on business, thinking he was letting himself in for an evening of Viennese tunes, he selected a play labeled *Old Music*. The play was straight drama with no Danube

in it, Blue or otherwise. But there was an actress in it named Garson, who brought Mayer sitting bolt upright in his seat.

During the intermission, a member of the Mayer entourage appeared backstage with the message, "Louis B. Mayer wants to see Miss Garson." The name meant nothing to her. Legend has it she thought him a stocking salesman and sent word she didn't want any.

When she did consent to see him she took a myopic view of his blandishments. She had grave doubts about what a camera would do to her. "I always spoiled the family-group pictures," she told him. Reassuringly, Mayer told her that he had never seen a face that clever lighting and proper camera technique couldn't help.

In the end she capitulated, but she specified that her surrender was to be "only an interlude." "What made up my mind was the hope that the California climate might help my mother's health," she explains now, but the fact is, the whopping salary Mayer mentioned was also one of the biggest salaries ever offered to a film freshman.

The interlude has stretched to nine years and seems destined to be the most permanent one on record. For almost a year it was the most forlorn, unhappy, abrasive, frustrating interlude any girl ever endured. The most frightening thing that can happen to an ambitious actress happened to Greer—nothing. She made a test or two, but they were promptly pigeonholed. While at Grenoble she had injured her back diving into a swimming pool. Now it began to bother her again, and she was hospitalized for weeks while surgeons discussed the advisability of fusing her vertebrae together into a tricky new design.

Her year's contract had just a week to run when her luck changed. Director Sam Wood had been given the job of carpentering the James Hilton best-seller *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* into a movie to be made in England. The part of Mrs. Chips was too small to appeal to any established star, and Wood had scraped the bottom of the talent barrel in an effort to find a girl who would play it. As a last resort, he had run off for him every test of players under contract in MGM's stock pile. Two and one half hours later he saw the

test Greer had made upon her arrival on the lot. A week later she was on her way back to England to work before a camera for the first time.

Speaking of Mrs. Chips, Greer said, "I asked myself how I could do anything with that sparrow of a woman. My mother comforted me. 'My dear,' she told me, 'the wife in this picture is not a sparrow, she's a dove. Yours will be the privilege of portraying a woman every man would like to have by his side. She is gentle and lovable. She gives out inspiration and an aura of relaxation.'" Greer added a dash of fierce simplicity to the characterization her mother outlined, and the critics tossed cheers around like confetti. So carried away was one reviewer with its moving qualities that he called it a Four-Handkerchief picture.

The lines Greer spoke in Mr. Chips covered only three sheets of script, but they covered her with glory. Some of that glory spilled over into a cable from Mayer, pleading with her to come back to Hollywood. She viewed his plea apathetically. She had traveled 12,000 miles, from England and back again, with a soul-trying stop-over in California, to make one film, and she had made up her mind not to go back unless she was guaranteed the opportunity to make at least two pictures a year.

She was in a mood not to let herself be pushed around any more, and with the exception of three pictures, *Remember?*, *Adventure*, and *Desire Me*, she has resisted all nudges from the front office to make movies she wasn't completely sold on. *Adventure*, the Gable come-back film, may yet gross a fat pile of dollars for Metro, but Greer wasn't happy about it. One misadventure like *Adventure* was enough, and it is doubtful if she will ever again let someone else think for her when it comes to selecting a story.

When asked about *Remember?*, her first picture after Mr. Chips, she prefers not to. Her next film, *Pride and Prejudice*, was voted one of the best ten pictures of the year by a New York critic jury, but the Metro prospectors were still trying to relocate the pay streak they had stumbled upon in Mr. Chips. The Mr. Chips' lode was re-discovered in *Blossoms in the Dust*. *Blossoms* put Greer down in

the middle of a swarm of children. They were other people's illegitimate ones, but they gave her a chance to show her hand at being a mother, even if a proxy one. Also, Blossoms first blended Walter Pidgeon and Garson together into a box-office cocktail that made movie dipsomaniacs by the theaterful.

The picture Mrs. Miniver transmuted the Garson ore from gold into platinum. Also, it was the answer to any questions Greer might have been asking herself about her private and personal love life. In the novel, Mrs. Miniver, the children were of tender years. Needing young romance in addition to the mature one between Mr. and Mrs. Miniver, the script writers put the situation into a story-conference hopper. One of the Miniver sons emerged from that hopper old enough to fall in love with a daughter of the county aristocracy.

"It was an odd family," Greer said. "As a mother, I had a small tot or two, then my brood skipped ten or fifteen years to a son just down from the university. I thought I was crossing those mother-part bridges before I came to them."

Greer continued to protest at being cast as old enough to have a son at Oxford, but losing the battle brought her a husband, Richard Ney. Ney drew the assignment of Greer's grown-up son. He got off to a running start in his campaign to advance himself from screen son to real-life husband by grinning at the red-haired star, when she was introduced to him formally by a hushed-voiced studio emissary. Ney greeted her with, "Hello, Red." To a woman fed to the teeth by the star system, which forces its victims to live in the sub-zero weather atop a pedestal, such informality had a melting effect. Soon they were appearing together at places featuring the warmer dance bands.

After seeing a few of her fan letters, Ney sat down and whipped out one of his own. "I don't want your photograph," he wrote her. "I don't want your autograph. I want you."

He was called to active duty as a naval officer when the United States entered the war. After cruising around in the Aleutians for a while, he was given a leave. The day before it expired, he and

Greer were married. Hollywood prophesied that the marriage would last no more than three months, but its durability made chumps out of the prophets. It lasted more than three years. By that time there were signs that the prophets would be proved right. In the opinion of this reporter, Ney developed an incurable case of bruised male ego. Once, while I was interviewing his good-looking wife, he blew in from the gardenia cultivating he was doing to occupy his time and came very close to deliberately busting up the conversation by saying, "Tell the nice man a story, Mommy." I watched to see how Greer would handle him. She did it suavely and neatly. Before he knew it, Ney was dispatched to find a bottle of wine. When he returned I was out of doors in a summer house with Greer, getting on with my interviewing.

Greer lives in a pleasant house. Its bleached-oak-paneled walls and big fireplace look comfortably English. Two pianos stand back to back in a music alcove. Greer likes piano duets, musical friends who drop in—play the other one.

One of Greer's favorite photographs shows her in her Random Harvest kilts. The advisability of her appearance in a shimmering expanse of hose was weighed by her studio almost as carefully as was the Army's decision to drop the first atomic bomb. Director Sidney Franklin remembers the studio's trepidation on that occasion. "We felt it would be a mistake suddenly to throw her legs at the public, and we didn't want to have her 'go Hollywood' on the screen; so we had kilts made in three different lengths, and tried them all out. Finally we decided to use the medium-length ones."

The reaction to the unveiling of Greer's knees was not a violent one. The fans said, "M'-m'-m, nice." But that was all. Yet it was proof, if one were needed, that her appeal is not based upon the blatant aspects of sex. In her next picture her limbs were once more hidden.

Once she confided to Helen Hayes her desire to play a screen light-o'-love. Helen chided her by saying, "The way people feel about you, it would be like Santa Claus taking off his beard before small children."

Those citizens of Hollywood who have made up their minds not to like Garson, crack that "Garson's principal role is that of Garson." The thought behind this snide slur is that she works even harder at being a film star off the set than she does on. There is a strong element of envy in such cattiness, envy born of the fact that she leads the pack by several lengths without having had to pay the usual penalties for doing so. She has yet to be mired in any scandal; she doesn't have to maintain face by putting in an appearance at Romanoff's or Chasen's or Ciro's; she makes no cringing bows to those twin bugaboos the Hollywood Reporter and Hollywood Variety; she gets along at the studio without having to pout or stage any stay-at-home strikes; she is canny with the money she earns; she sees socially only whom she pleases; she doesn't throw huge parties, and is therefore not obligated to attend those thrown by others.

An important part of her animation is her volubility. But by her own admission she is exceedingly shy. She hates to enter a room full of strange people. If they stare at her, she makes an excuse to leave. And—to lug in the psychologists once more—when people are diffident, highstrung or nervous they often hide those things behind a freshet of words. Fortunately for those exposed to Greer's conversational flood, it is not turgid or muddy.

Greer approaches each acting assignment as if preparing to write a master's thesis on the subject. Cast as Madame Curie, she enlisted the aid of the studio research department as well as several libraries in securing every scrap of available information about the Polish scientist. Letters, biographies, diaries, even marginal notes penned in the Curie cookbooks, were grist for the Garson mill. Before she was done she knew Madame Curie's favorite poem by heart and was able to suggest to the MGM scenario department that that poem would provide a dramatic finale for the film. The script writers leaped happily at the suggestion, and it did help give the picture impact.

When she isn't busy sopping up knowledge about the lives, ways and loves of the women she is called upon to act, she feeds vora-

ciously on other books in all of the weight classifications, with special attention to welterweight and heavyweight tomes. Her own collection of books of poetry is well thumbed. She also knows as much about the ballet and symphonic music as the next person—unless the next person happens to be someone like George Balanchine or Arturo Toscanini.

Regardless of the darts hurled at her by those who are annoyed by her drive, single-minded purposefulness, agile intellect and success, she has nothing to fear from the most hard-boiled critics an actress can face. Crewmen—electricians, cameramen, grips—can spot a phony or make up their minds whether a star does things for effect as easily as they can switch on a baby spot. But when Greer inquires about a grip's sick baby or asks what's happened to an electrician who fails to show up for work, the crew on one of her pictures doesn't think she's putting on an act. The way they feel about her is shown by the fact that her carpenters fashioned a highly polished and intricately mortised box for her, to hold the tea things she uses in her dressing room. And they did it on their own time.

Near the end of filming *Madame Curie*, her director told Greer it was necessary to reshoot one scene—the one in which she approached her laboratory worktable to find the first speck of radium giving out its ghostly radiance. Greer gave the long walk across the laboratory floor all she had. Reaching the table, she peered into the radium crucible lying there. Instead of whatever the special-effects department had rigged up to double for radium, she discovered a tiny package. On it was written: *TO OUR BEST GIRL, FROM THE CREW*. In it was a small gold ring set with six tiny ruby chips.

"It only cost a hundred and thirty-five bucks," one crew member said, "but she wears it. That's the point. We seen it on her."

Millions of people all over the world think and speak of her by her first name; those at MGM describe this phenomenon as "a very personalized feeling." But her crew, with an exhibition of respect—notable in Hollywood, where crewmen are never awed by reputations—call her "Miss Garson."

"You don't get any cussing from her," one electrician said. "I've worked with some of the biggest dames in the business, and you'd be surprised what they say when they're hot under the collar. Not her. What's more, we watch our own language on her set. Nobody can say of us we don't know how to act around a lady."

It is even more of a muscle-stretching problem for a Hollywood box office champion to maintain her lofty altitude once she reaches it than it was for her to climb to the heights in the first place. As with an Everest climber, the higher the climb, the more treacherous the crevasses; the more cyclonic the storms that swirl around the peaks. One misstep may not prove a fatal one, but a second or third in succession is likely to send the mountain climber pitching fanny-over-teakettle into the abyss in spite of the fact that such mishaps may not be her fault. A misstep on the part of an actress who has proved that she can act and has demonstrated her warmth and charm, must be blamed upon story trouble first, direction second, her supporting cast third.

Following Greer's stumble in *Adventure* (*Adventure* was the Clark Gable back-from-the-wars vehicle for which Metro coined the fairly repellent slogan, "Gable's Back and Garson's Got Him"), Greer Garson suffered her second successive slip from the summit with a resounding flop called *Desire Me*. Although it is only fair to add that, because of her drawing power (plus Gable's) *Adventure* earned \$2,395,000 more than it cost to make. In the case of *Desire Me* so unhappy was the result of trying to confect a nourishing film dish out of skimpy pemmican plot and soluble story soup cubes that none of the head cooks who helped stir it permitted their names to be listed as participating chefs.

Having once before scored a box office pratt-fall in *Remember*, and having come up looking and smelling like a Mrs. Miniver rose afterward, Greer set her jaw, and waited for another chance. Primarily, she wanted a picture in which both she and the audience could have fun. Her studio felt that they had such a movie in *Julia Misbehaves*. The MGM brass told themselves that the only pratt-falls in it would be the ones their red-haired star committed

deliberately for the sweet sake of entertainment. In it Greer was tossed around by five acrobats and did a nose dive from a pile of logs into a mud puddle; all of which robustious hijinks were a far cry from the womanly sedateness that surrounded Mrs. Miniver.

What her studio thinks of the cry-havoc chorus who joyfully bleated after *Adventure* and *Desire Me* that she was finding the going tough, is shown by the contract she signed in 1947. Last year, unhappy about the kind of pictures she had been given, Greer descended upon Metro's Poobah, Louis B. Mayer, to tell him how she felt about the shoddiness in the goods she'd been asked to help huckster. A group of independent producers and directors who envisioned a big organization, important enough to keep the old line studios awake nights, had offered Garson five million dollars to sign with them, the sum to be payable over a period of years. While taking a breather in New York, she had no less than twelve stage offers; not tentative ones—scripts were actually offered her by producers—and four other studios made overtures to her. Although her old contract still had three years to go, Mayer tore it up and wrote out a new one. Metro's front office boys are reticent about divulging its terms; if they were known every other actor and actress on the lot would turn pea-green with envy. But it is in essence a life-time contract, extending over so many years it makes the usual seven-year variety seem a pygmy by comparison.

Metro isn't sitting back on its ample haunches waiting to see how Julia Misbehaves makes out before planning more Garson screen doings. In her immediate future—at least, at the present writing—are *The Chimes of Bruges* (to be shot in Brussels and Bruges); a Mrs. Miniver sequel which will deal with the Miniver family in post-war Britain; a script based on *The Forsythe Saga*; a comedy called *The Saintly Miss Peters*, a story about a school teacher who is sent to a state capital to lobby for a teachers' bill only to become involved with a motley crew of politicians and gangsters.

The young, green-eyed, opulently beautiful screen actress, Ava Gardner, works for the same studio where Greer labors. But her first screen appearances were a far cry from the "wifely virtue,"

"restrained charm," and "touch of implied spirituality" that characterizes the parts played by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's titian-tressed first lady.

Ava Gardner has been labeled a "second look girl" and a "lovely and inscrutable creature who drives men wild with desire." Her lush contours have been acclaimed North Carolina's outstanding contribution to American culture. But during a Chicago stop-over, while en route to New York from California, she embarked on a culture hunt of her own. She went out to buy a book.

She was married to Band Leader Artie Shaw, who was kicking up a domestic ruckus about the slowness of the progress she was making in improving her mind. Her mind is naturally quick and retentive, but Shaw, whose friends regard him as a "brain" as well as an extremely nimble-fingered lad with a clarinet, had discovered that his excitingly fabricated wife had not even a nodding acquaintance with the works of Marcel Proust. She was even less chummy with the products of certain other writers, such as Plato and Thomas Mann.

So eager was he to close these gaps in her literary background that whenever he found her with a spare minute on her hands, he promptly shoved her shapely nose into a wordy volume. Those who witnessed his attempts say that at times he resembled a man determined to teach a willing but unweaned kitten how to drink milk from a saucer.

Book in hand and hoping for an encouraging pat of connubial approbation, Ava Gardner tripped happily back to her hotel. Her husband took her purchase from her, eyed it apoplectically, and hurled it from him with scorn. He made it clear that, as far as he was concerned, it wasn't the kind of brain food that contained a nourishing supply of intellectual vitamins.

The incident points up what her friends mean when they said, "There is only one word for the things that have happened to Ava. They've been ironic." In 1946, when she divorced Shaw, he married Kathleen Winsor. Kathleen Winsor is the author of *Forever*

Amber. Forever Amber was the book Ava had fetched home to the hotel.

In view of the things that have happened to her since her marriage to the band leader was dissolved, it is certainly ironic that Ava Gardner should still be known to many as "the girl who married Mickey Rooney *and* Artie Shaw," and as nothing more. This identification is still made automatically, although there are signs that indicate that the ex-Mrs. Rooney and ex-Mrs. Shaw is well on her way to achieving her own identity. Her services as a movie actress are in such demand that when, within a single week, cinema star John Payne was approached by four producers offering him starring roles, each of them held out "We're hoping to get Ava Gardner as your co-star" as an inducement for signing with them.

A French newspaper was so enamored of her charms—they understand such things well in France—that when it printed a photograph of her clad in a lamé swim suit so snug that it had apparently been applied with a goldbeater's hammer, the Gallic caption writer, searching his mind for just the right word, referred to her as "délicieuse." The press of her own country considered it worthy of note that she hates nighties—always wears pajamas—that she detests breakfast in bed—likes to "get up, wash my face, walk around, work up an appetite." These signs may seem trifling to the uninitiated; they are regarded as highly significant by Hollywood.

More significant still, after seeing her in *The Hucksters*, a film critic for the New York Morning Telegraph wrote that, although heretofore she had been considered just another bit of Hollywood fluff, she had played the role of the ambitious night-club singer in that film in a way that showed unexpected talents as an actress, and had demonstrated that she possessed a personality full of sincerity and warmth, plus a not-inconsiderable beauty. On the basis of this one performance alone, the Telegraph's critic predicted that she was headed for stardom.

It is equally sardonic—but not at all unusual in Hollywood—that she should have spent four long years at her home studio—Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer—posing for leg art and uttering an average of a

little more than one line per movie in a succession of films, only to have the brace of pictures produced by two outside studios make the movie fans suddenly conscious of her existence. Hollywood took a long, whistle-punctuated look at the sultry gun moll in *The Killers* and the bosomy home-town girl in *Whistle Stop*, and christened her "M-G-M's tomato surprise."

She may have been a surprise to M-G-M—M-G-M vehemently denies it—but she is definitely no tomato, as disappointing as that statement may be to collectors of pin-upiana. "It depends entirely on the girl," she said sagely. "I've never had to slap the hands of the men who really know me to get them to behave." But the fact that she has been thought of in tomato terms has given rise to still other examples of irony. Recently, when she visited her bank to make a withdrawal, her shoulder-length, red-brown hair flowed helter-skelter. She wore her favorite costume: saddle shoes and socks, a ballerina skirt, a blouse. Her face was innocent of make-up. The cashier looked at her suspiciously, then retired to the rear of the bank to check her signature and consult with the head cashier. When he came back he apologized and explained, "You just don't look like Ava Gardner."

Not only bank cashiers but some of Hollywood's plushier hostesses seem convinced that when they ask her to a party one of the screen demimondaines she has played will show up. Not long ago the secretary of a movie mogul's wife reached her on the phone to say, "Mrs. — expects you for dinner next Friday evening. She is sure you will amuse the stags."

Another movie-capital first lady called her to suggest, "If you're not having an affair with anyone at the moment, I've a young man I'd like to have you meet." She added proudly, "He's quite a wolf."

When such things happen, Ava Gardner is annoyed, but not surprised. "People are always expecting to see a girl like Kitty from *The Killers* or Jean Ogilvie from *The Hucksters* instead of me," she said.

It is most ironic of all that this "me," when set down on paper, is pretty anticlimactic; and not only anticlimactic but completely con-

tradictory to the picture of her that sticks, burlike, in the public's mind. The way the public thinks of her goes something like this: "Here's a girl who, at the age of twenty-three, had already been married and divorced twice, both times from men nobody has ever thought of calling Little Lord Fauntleroy. The gossip columnists have linked her name with various members of the Hollywood wolf pack, and a girl who photographs the way she does and acts those movie hotchas as convincingly as she acts them is bound to be a warm dish in private life too."

A number of people in Hollywood with no studio-publicity axes to grind, and who know Ava Gardner when she's not working in front of a movie camera, disagree sharply with the public. If they are to be believed—and they pack a lot of conviction into what they say about her—the hussy-seeming Gardner the public meets in newspaper photos, rotogravure pages, Sunday-feature sections and picture magazines is largely a creation of make-up, clever lighting, slick camera work and gossip columnists striving to gratify their readers' wishful thinking. Such friends have it that the highly combustible Ava Gardner who rises, smoldering, above a deep *décolletage* is, at one and the same time, disturbingly real and a trick done with movie mirrors.

When first stumbled upon, this conception of the lady sounds as if those who are promoting it are deliberately plying a fire extinguisher to quench the flames of publicity that might singe her career. But it is difficult to believe that all those people should be engaged in an elaborate plot to spread a previously agreed upon line of propaganda. What the women who know her best have to say about her is particularly revealing, for women aren't apt to give another woman any the best of it if they have any mental reservations whatsoever as to her Jezebel qualities.

According to her lawyer-manager's wife, Ruth Rosenthal, "Ava is a cushion plumper at heart, a girl who ought to go back to North Carolina, marry some nice man and have a flock of babies." It doesn't make for inflammatory copy, but the truth is that she spends

a lot of time acting as a baby-sitter for the children of such friends as the Rosenthals.

Ava herself said, "Sometimes as much as two weeks will go by and I won't have a date. I can't see any percentage in stepping out just for the sake of stepping. Two months ago I showed up at a drive-in with a boy, and right away the columnists said we were going to be married. The trouble with most of the people in this town is that they believe everything they read in a column, even if they've paid a planter to plant it there for them."

Among those who help step up the male-pulse-hurrying potential with which Ava Gardner was born is a man named Eric. Eric operates a camera in the M-G-M portrait studio. Ava described his technique as follows: "He stands behind his camera and says, 'O.K., let's make this one sexy.' Then he tells me to slit my eyes and poke out my bottom lip and wet it. That's supposed to be sexy too."

As far as Ava is concerned, it is another ironic fact that while her salary has been raised at the regular intervals specified in her contract—she is now paid about \$50,000 a year—of late, her upward progress has been so swift that her home studio can, if it wishes, fatten its bank account by quadruple that amount by merely lending her out for a couple of pictures a year. Her lend-out price tag has zoomed to nearly \$100,000, with M-G-M hoping no one will take them up on it.

Although this particular bit of irony is not peculiar to Ava alone, even on a salary of approximately \$50,000 a year she must still live with comparative frugality. What with her manager-lawyer's fee and her agent's 10 per cent cut, plus state and Federal income taxes, about 71 per cent of her pay is gone before she gets her hands on it. Her manager-lawyer allows her only \$176 a week as expense money. Out of this she must pay her rent and maid's salary, as well as her clothing, food, lighting, auto upkeep, cleaning and drug bills. The rental for her two-bed-room, living room, kitchen and dinette apartment is \$200 a month. That portion of her gross earnings that remains—it totals only about 15 per cent—goes into savings and investments.

A girl in Ava's spot must also fork over for certain business expenses. Two examples will suffice. At the conclusion of any picture in which she appears, it is expected of her that she will hand out a number of gratuities and tips to many of the people concerned with the making of it. She must also engage in business entertainment to latch onto the roles she wants, as well as to grab off the directors, producers and writers she prefers. This means luncheons or dinners—paid for by her business manager out of her funds—for those who have the say in such matters.

Ava Gardner was born December 24, 1922, in Grabtown, near Smithfield, in North Carolina's Johnston County. Her father was a farmer who raised cotton and bright-leaf tobacco. While Ava was still a baby he lost his farm, and thereafter farmed on shares. To help out, her mother ran a boarding-house for schoolteachers. The Gardners lived in the teachers' dormitory. When Ava was twelve, her family moved to Newport News, Virginia, then back to North Carolina. In high school and during the one year she spent at Atlantic Christian College, she took a commercial course—shorthand, typing, business English. After three years of plugging away at it, she could take shorthand at the rapid-fire speed of 130 words a minute, and could type sixty words every sixty seconds. A brother paid for her Atlantic Christian tuition. Her goal was a secretarial job, probably in Raleigh, North Carolina. One of her married sisters lived there.

Had it not been for a photographer brother-in-law, Larry Tarr, North Carolina's "second look girl" would have drawn second looks only in her native Tarheel bailiwick. When she was eighteen, the youngest member of the Gardner family packed her saddle shoes, washed and blocked her sweater collection, and took off to spend a vacation with another married sister, Mrs. Larry Tarr, in New York.

Tarr, a great one for taking people's pictures in his mind, made a mental snapshot of his young sister-in-law who sat half asleep across the breakfast table from him. Afterwards he strove to capture the same effect in his studio, and sent copies of the portraits he had taken to Ben Jacobson, a New York Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer rep-

representative. So melting was the result that Jacobson asked to see the original. When Ava was ushered into his office, he gave her a script to read. When she read it, he couldn't understand a word she said. The girl standing before him not only had the South in her mouth but a large slice of North Carolina's farming country as well. When Jacobson asked her name, she replied "Aa-a-a-vah Gahd-nah." She pronounced the word "five" "faave," and dropped her g's all over his office like shattered magnolia blossoms.

Jacobson shook his head in dazed fashion and said, "We'll make a silent test. If I send a sound track out to the Coast with nothing on it but vocal spoonbread, they'll have my head examined."

There was a craze for the kind of photography that had made Hedy Lamarr the rage in Algiers—big, dreamy, softly lit close-ups. That was the treatment Jacobson gave Ava. Placed before a camera, she was told, "Now look up. . . . Look down. . . . Now smile. . . . Pick up a vase of flowers." Hollywood legend has it that when her silent test arrived in California, M-G-M's brass reached for their telephones and yelled, "She can't act; she didn't talk; she's sensational! Get her out here!"

She was offered the usual seven-year contract, fifty dollars a week to begin with; options every six months. Each time her option was taken up, her pay would go up—not much, but enough to make a grass-green North Carolina farm girl, to whom fifty dollars a week was very big money indeed, think the boost a fantastically generous one.

In common with most properly brought up Southern women of the old school, Ava's mother was inclined to think of Hollywood in Sodom-and-Gomorra terms, and she gave her consent to her "baby's" westward trek only when an older daughter volunteered to go along to protect Ava. On her first day at the M-G-M lot, Ava was taken on a tour of the sound stages. The first star to whom she was introduced was Mickey Rooney. The M-G-M employee who performed that introduction remembers, "I said, 'This is Mickey Rooney, honey—I guess that accent of hers had sort of got me—

and Mickey went blooey. No sooner was I back in my office than he called to ask me Ava's address and telephone number."

"Back home," Ava said, "I'd been taught that the first time a boy calls you, you're supposed to tell him you're busy for a week in advance, whether you are or not. Mickey didn't accept that kind of answer." The next six months in the life of the studio's newest importation consisted of trying to rid herself of her thick, sub-Mason-and-Dixon's-line accent. She was also subjected to Rooney's blitzkrieg courtship, and posing for publicity photographs—mostly in swim suits or playtime bras and shorts. The M-G-M publicity department considered her real background so drab that its earlier publicity releases tried to pump glamour into it by referring to her as an ex-Powers model, although she had never been one. Some fan writers, taking their cue from those releases, still mention her stint of modeling.

The problem of stamping No'th Ca'lina out of her voice was entrusted to Lillian Burns, M-G-M's dramatic coach, and to Gertrude Fogler, the studio's diction coach. She was given pages of words ending in "er" to read out loud slowly and distinctly, so that her "er's" would sound less like "ah's." It was decided that her speech was too slow; was more "noise" than "sound." An effort was made to give her "tone" where her mentors felt there was "non-tone"—whatever that is—to replace her Southern accent with a Midwestern one, which the studio's diction coach thought "a more universally understood dialect."

Although Rooney only came up to her shoulder—Hollywood wags sometimes describe him as having been "knee-high to his first wife"—he was a stream of gamma rays when it came to wooing. The older daughter Ava's mother had appointed as her chaperon was capable of holding her own when it came to fending off unscrupulous characters. She was overmatched when she encountered a man bound and determined to marry her sister. There were non stop phone calls from Rooney, flowers from Rooney arriving in van loads, dates with Rooney almost every night.

Said Ava's chaperon sister, "Although the first time you see

Mickey, his shortness kind of stuns you, he's a real gentleman when he's courting a girl. Only he's got to tell you how to do things all the time. Mickey is a type, when you ask him what time it is, he's likely to tell you how to build a clock." The fact that she was being squired by one of the studio's pet stars—he was also the nation's top box-office draw—could not help but flatter her.

And Ava and Mickey were married in January, 1942. They were divorced in 1943. "I tried hard to make the marriage work," Ava said. "I was Mickey's greatest audience. He was 'on' (on stage) all the time, and I was careful not to offer him any competition." According to Ava, Rooney made it plain early in their brief marriage that he didn't want any home life—he "often failed to come home for days at a time"—and when she wanted to stay home, he wanted to step out.

The cynical took it for granted that she had married Mickey to further her career or to "clip him for plenty," or for both. The proof that she had neither in mind is that she did neither. "There would have been nothing to it," said one producer. "Chances are she could easily have got herself put into a low-budget picture as a star. Any big studio would do a favor like that for a big star, like Mickey, to keep him happy." According to the California community-property law, when her divorce was granted she was entitled to half of her husband's earnings from the time of their marriage until the time of their separation. Half of Rooney's earnings for one year was then \$75,000, but Ava asked for only \$25,000 as a settlement. "I'm a real modest type when it comes to divorce," she said.

Her next venture into matrimony—the one with Shaw—brought her even more emotional travail; left her even less well off financially. She married Shaw in 1945. Trying to understand the kind of conversation her husband and his friends engaged in—philosophy, economics, world trends, the meanings behind long-haired music—convinced her that she was a moron. She lost weight—dropped from 126 to 106 pounds—and acquired the habit of vomiting from sheer nervousness. "She was in a bad way," her friends said. "If you're that beautiful and can pick up a fan magazine and see your-

self in it and still have an inferiority complex, you must be pretty sick."

When a friend suggested, "Why don't you have an I.Q. test and find out if you really are a moron?" she did. She discovered that her rating was thirty points above average. But her self-confidence had become so corroded that she refused to believe the figure. When it became apparent that her second marriage was more than she could cope with, she salvaged from the wreckage only the \$5000 she herself had contributed to the Gardner-Shaw household-expenses kitty. One of her advisers at the time recalls, "Artie would have been more generous than that if she had wanted him to, but it was tough persuading her to ask for even that much." Following her divorce from Shaw, she began a series of visits to a psychiatrist. Her reason: "I was hoping he would be able to build a set of standards by which I could judge people in future."

The educational fight talks Shaw had given her still echoed in her mind, and she signed up for courses in economics and English literature at U.C.L.A.

On the Metro lot, she continued to dress up and walk around in such things as *Maisie Goes to Reno* and *She Went to the Races*. *Whistle Stop* broke the rhythm of this mediocrity. An independent producer, Seymour Nebenzal, saw latent talent in M-G-M's leg-art queen that others hadn't seen, and arranged to have her lent to him for *Whistle Stop*. The Nebenzal picture led to her role as Kitty in *The Killers*, and to Metro's realization that they had a could-be star on their hands.

The M-G-M promotional and exploitation machinery began to grind, and when those huge wheels begin to revolve the results are usually impressive. It was the studio's hope to polish Ava to such starry brilliance that the moviegoing public, fixing its gaze on the resultant glitter, would be attacked by a mass hypnosis and surge, 80,000,000 strong, into the country's movie houses to feast their eyes upon her loveliness.

M-G-M's head man, Louis B. Mayer, summoned her to his office to give her a fatherly little fight talk, the burden of which was:

"Young woman, you must take yourself more seriously and work harder!" Word filtered down from the front office to M-G-M's producers and to Billy Grady, the studio's casting director, to find a good part for her. A number of girls had been tested for the nightclub thrush in *The Hucksters*. Mayer insisted that Ava be tested too. Clark Gable himself—he is called "The King" by his fellow employees—made the test with her.

At a meeting of the studio's publicity department a decision was made as to what kind of Ava Gardner personality would be most readily merchandisable—whether she should be an Elizabeth Taylor type (girlish simplicity); a Lana Turner type (upper case sex); a Greer Garson type (ladylike). It was decided that she should be "*every* kind of girl."

Instructions were given to Wardrobe to use special care in dressing her. Hair-dressers were called in to experiment with hair-dos that would make the most of her facial contours. She was schooled in the tricky art of handling herself during an interview. After *The Hucksters* had been shot, she was turned over to a studio fashion-promotion expert, who worked with her for a month. During that back-breaking thirty days no fewer than 900 Gardner photographs were shot in sixty-two separate changes of clothing—with accessories to match—for the fan magazines, newspaper woman's pages and feature sections.

The Killers set Ava Gardner's feet tentatively on the stardom road. *The Hucksters* established her as a star personality. Yet, ironically, she was reluctant to appear in it. Her reluctance stemmed from two things. One of them she explained thus: "I'd begun to think that playing bad girls had served its purpose so far as I was concerned, and I didn't want to play that kind of role exclusively." The other reason was the fact that she was still suffering from her ingrown inferiority complex, and playing opposite a star of Clark Gable's magnitude frightened her. Studio pressure was brought to bear upon her, and a producer, a director and various friends warned her that she was passing up a fine opportunity.

One day Gable called her—but not for the same reason the others

had. "They've been after me to talk you into it," he said. "I told them I wouldn't do it. I've been talked into too many parts I didn't want, to talk somebody else into one."

In the end, she yielded, but when the cameras rolled, she still felt unsure of herself. When she was called upon to sing a song to Gable, she was so embarrassed at warbling a torchy ditty to a star on whom she had had a crush in grammar and high school that she couldn't continue until he left the set. "They gave me a chair to look at instead of Clark," she said. "After that it was better."

But being jittery didn't stop her from turning in a Grade A performance. She even contributed a switch that gave her part more warmth. Her Jean Ogilvie role had been written as that of a rapacious dame, bent upon using her sex to get ahead. Ava didn't dilute this sex element, but the girl she played was human and understanding, rather than rapacious. She managed to seem the kind of girl who'd rather whip up a cozy meal in her apartment for a man and feed him a shot of after-dinner brandy than blow his coin at a hot spot,

Despite losing two decisions to marriage—she might be pardoned if she decided that, to use a British wartime expression, she "had had it," matrimonially speaking—Ava Gardner is hopeful that with increasing maturity and the help of her psychiatrist, she will make a go of marriage if she tries it again. Her acquisitive mind has picked up and held a smattering of psychiatric jargon. "There's something in me that must be masochistic," she admitted. "I must have a drive to be emotionally and mentally beaten down, and I've got to control it! The next man I marry ought to be about thirty-five and shouldn't be an actor. But if the right man doesn't show, I might have to make a few concessions." Then she said thoughtfully, "Some men want mothers, not wives." It is obvious that she doesn't relish the prospect of extending her baby-sitting activities to husbands.

As a by-product of her marriage to Shaw, she owns an extensive library of symphonic recordings. But her favorite disk is a transcription made last year when Louella Parsons interviewed Gable on the air. During that broadcast, Gable said, "Would you like to know

who I think is the most glamorous girl on the horizon? Keep your eye on Ava. I think she's great. I believe that in another two years you'll find she's the best young actress in Hollywood."

Ava plays that one over and over. When it comes to buttressing her ego, it's better than any visit to a psychiatrist.

From time to time, Hollywood has had foreign bodies (as well as ones from North Carolina) in its eye. Among them have been Pola Negri, Anna Sten, Simone Simon, Danielle Darrieux, and Lupe Velez. But having discovered through bitter experiences that it takes more than push-button temperament and a hoop-la publicity build-up to keep the chill off the box-office, those who make movies have learned to greet even the most exotic importation with a skeptical, not to say bored, air.

Still, whatever the movie colony has thought about a foreign body named Maria Antonia Gracia Vidal De Santo Silas Aumont, known on the screen as Maria Montez—and sometimes what it has thought wouldn't be suitable for the girls at Miss Spence's to use as a cookie cutter in shaping their nubile dreams—it has never been bored by her.

Montez is a girl who not only lives up to the most explosive traditions of her predecessors but has dreamed up a few demolition ideas of her own. Physically, she is more disturbing than even the attractively stacked Sten or the kitten-eyed Simon. And while Lupe Velez was sometimes good for a few sticks of type, Maria Montez is a whole font of type to those who need a chunk of copy to fill a newspaper column in a hurry.

When—it seldom happens in Los Angeles—there is a scarcity of Carbn Casanovas and Ding-Dong Daddies with a weakness for marrying fifteen women in rapid succession or a week end turns up devoid of night-spot fisticuffs, Los Angeles city editors are apt to bark at idle reporters, "Get out to Beverly Hills and see Montez!" Nor do the reporters often come back empty-handed. For, though Maria is a ball of fire in the studio, in her own drawing room she is Halley's comet colliding with a super nova. Even in a community where the competition in the field is red-hot, the comely Santo

Domingan is easily the outstanding exponent of uninhibited self-expression.

Such titbits have been brought back from these interviews as, "To date, I have given the movie audiences sex. From now on, I weel combine sex with drama." And the statement, "Not a day passes that I do not do sometheeng to further my career," which may explain the fact that for months scarcely a fan mag or movie page felt complete without a close-up of the Montez legs.

Columnist Earl Wilson wrote one of his most-talked-of stories after an interview with Montez and a study of the Wilson column gives some idea of the Montez flavor. A high light of his interview with her ran something like this:

WILSON: "How many baths have you taken? In pictures, I mean."

MONTÉZ: "Out of fifteen pictures, in about thirteen either I have been in a bath or a sweem. My studio gives the public their money's worth. Mr. Hays watches me close, and I can never kiss the guy. He says too hawt. . . . Brassières! My dear fellow, I never have used them. I have no need for them, thank Gawd."

Writing about Montez is the next best thing to being allowed to jot down anything that jumps into your head. Who but Montez would be honest enough to admit, "I am still a professional amateur." Who else could write a textbook called *Hollywood Wolves I Have Tamed* to teach girls how to handle predatory males—a volume, she believes, that will fill a long-felt need? "A date is a sort of chess game," she said, "and the idea is for a girl to win without making her opponent so mad he turns the board over and goes home. The girl's job is to make a good loser out of heem." It takes a Montez to describe Orson Welles by saying, "He is every bit as spectacular as I am." And certainly no one save Maria would explain her success by murmuring, "Eet is because I look sexy—but sweet!"

Not everybody thinks Montez is the works. The credibility of the story of her life as given out by both Montez and her studio publicity department is doubted by the congenitally suspicious. There are even those caddish enough to say that she can't act for sour apples, and that she arrived where she is by the device of making spectacular

entrances into night clubs, clad in evening dresses that would give the Hays office a stroke if she appeared in them on the screen. Other low characters have been known to claim that her accent is phony, and that she never came from the Dominican Republic at all, but probably from Brooklyn.

Such verbal thank-you-marms slow down the Montez progress about as effectively as a handful of carpet tacks strewn in the path of a General Sherman tank. To those who refuse to believe that anything about Montez is genuine, including her accent, two facts should prove somewhat disconcerting. In November of 1943, she received from Flor Trujillo, daughter of the president of the Dominican Republic, the Order of Juan Pablo Duarte and the Order of Trujillo. She was the first woman of her country to wear them. According to the citation read by Miss Trujillo, they were awarded for promoting friendly relations between the United States and the Dominican Republic and for outstanding feminine achievement. It is extremely unlikely that the daughter of the president of the Dominican Republic would get herself so far out on a limb for a girl hailing from Brooklyn.

When Maria brought her younger sisters to America, she parked them in a Philadelphia apartment under the care of the Dominican Republic's representative there, while they were given intensive lessons in English, prior to their arrival in California. Mrs. John Alexander, instructor in romance languages at the University of Pennsylvania, was employed to tutor the quartet. Mrs. Alexander, a wise and discerning woman, feels there is no reason to doubt that Maria's sisters were exactly what they claimed to be, or, by the same token, to doubt that Maria herself is strictly the McCoy, convent education, accent and all.

Such a keen judge of Hollywood as Frederick C. Othman, who covered the movie colony for the United Press, once said of her, "Miss Montez has been a movie actress for two years and three months, and a press agent all her life. What she advertises is Miss Montez exclusively. She knows all her good points."

Maria writes regularly to all the theater managers she has met

while making personal-appearance tours. Instead of making friends among the movie makers, she chose her first companions from among the ranks of the press photographers. She dotes on posing for still shots for publication. If the studio photographers fail to summon her for a sitting, she summons them.

On her first day at Universal City, she walked into the studio commissary for lunch dressed like a matched pair of Mrs. Astor's plush horses and wearing a fur hat resembling the Tower of Pisa in mink. Under her arm, she carried a movie trade journal. While waiting to be served, and using the trade journal as if it were a script, she put on a dramatic performance that combined her idea of the best tricks of Katharine Cornell, Duse, Bernhardt and Tallulah Bankhead. As she read, she frowned looked startled, gave out with an occasional tinkling little laugh or throaty chuckle.

A waitress distressed at seeing such a performance wasted on hungry film workers intent on the blue-plate special rather than on art, told her that the studio executives seldom lunched so early. Rising to her feet, Maria swayed gracefully out, to come back an hour later, in a complete change of costume, to put on an even more impressive show when those who mattered were present to see it.

One witness to her acting on that occasion said, "She put tragedy into the slicing of a steak. She buttered her bread with wild abandon. There was passion in the way she consumed her dessert. When she left, the dining room lost its sparkle. The food lost its zest. The curtain had fallen on another Montez performance."

What her detractors forget is that every moment of the day and night, she knows where she is going, what she wants, and the best way to snaffle it for Montez. She operates on the theory that standing up on her own two eye-filling legs and yelling for her rights, while at the same time clubbing people over the head with her overpowering personality, will bring home a choice brand of bacon generously streaked with lean. The head screwed on her decorative shoulders is not stuffed with goofer feathers or idle girlish vaporings. The mind behind her velvet-textured Latin façade closes on an opportunity like the jaws of a bear trap. This fact has come as a nasty

shock to more than one agent or studio executive who, up to that point, had thought of himself as being the ruthless character Budd Schulberg used as the prototype for the hero of *What Makes Sammy Run*.

Having accumulated Montez stories and anecdotes by the score, I approached an interview with her with much the same trepidation I imagine a girl in a dirndl feels when she encounters the compressed-air jets in an amusement-park fun house. Maggy Maskel, appointed by the Universal publicity department to supervise our meeting, seemed a little tense, too, and when the interview was under way the reason for her lack of relaxation became apparent. Unknown to me, Montez was warming up for a feud with her employers, and with thunder gathering behind the Montez brow, Maskel was understandably under a strain.

My first impression of Montez was a golden one. The dress she wore gave off a golden effect. Her skin seemed to have been given a golden wash. Her eyes were speckled with gold flecks, and her hair was a dark red gold.

Throughout luncheon, she carried the conversational ball while I struggled to get on the same wave length with her accent. One of her younger sisters, Lucita, was scheduled to be looked over that afternoon by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer as a screen prospect, and, along with the chicken en casserole, Maria fed her sage advice. "Remember you're a queen and raise hell, keed," she said. "When you see Louis B. Mayer, don't be afraid. Jus' look heem in the eye and say, 'What's cooking, L. B.?'"

The sister, a seventeen-year-old with the serenely sure-of-herself poise seventeen-year-olds often have, went off for her appointment concentrating on an I-am-a-queen approach, and we adjourned to the living room.

There was a pause, and Montez asked, "Did you see me in *Cobra Woman*?" I shook my head registering a proper regret. "That *Cobra Woman* was a steenker," she said. "I never like my peectures. I have quit one hundred and forty-eight times."

From the point of view of a studio such remarks had no place

in a properly conducted interview, and Maskel said pleadingly, "You're ruining me." But Maria was not slowed down by Maskel's distress.

"I never pay much attention to my leading men," she continued. "I call them 'my leetle men.' I would rather play third feedle to Boyer than first feedle to one of them. I have nothing against Jon Hall. I have a deep, warm feeling for heem, but I don't want to make another film with heem. Theengs have come to such a pass that if I am in a peecture without Jon Hall, people weel say, 'Are they keeding?'"

"Tell him about your book," Maskel suggested hopefully.

The gold-washed face lit up. "I am writing a book called Forever is a Long Time," she told me. "Eet is a study of a very passionate and a very wild girl. She is born in Spain. She has fallen in love with a ghost. She has a strange dream. His five fingers are touching her, but she can see nothing, so, naturally, notheeng happens. Her father and mother are both keeled in a hunting accident, so she can't go back to Spain. Everywhere she go, she looks for heem all the time in the flesh, and not as a ghost. Meantime she fight, fight, fight with her husband." (Up to that point I hadn't realized that the ghost-loving heroine was married.) "Then she comes to America, where thees ghost man actually is. She is in her bath wondering why she cannot fall in love, then she gets dressed and goes to a place where she is very bored. The man of her dreams appears. He says so-and-so to her, and they love passionately. The love scenes are done with such delicacy, eet is all very *spirituel*. There are no bulging stomachs. They are both streamlined. My style is poetic. I have three hundred pages done, and it may run to three fifty or four hundred. What you theenk?"

It seemed, I said, to have practically everything.

"I was a very strange leetle girl myself," Montez said, "very much like the girl in thees book. I went to a convent, too, like the girl in my book." She smiled at me. "As a matter of fact, eet was the same convent."

The official studio biography says of her: "She is five feet, seven

inches tall. Size 5 shoes. Her hips measure thirty-six inches, her bust thirty-five inches. She was born June 6, 1920." The name "Montez" came to her after reading about the adventures of the famous nineteenth-century femme fatale, Lola Montez.

Maskel tried to keep her on the autobiographical beam.

"My father was the Spanish consul in the Dominican Republic," Montez said. "I remember the Canary Islands and Tenerife first. I have five brothers and four seester. I used to blow my breath in my baby seester's eyes to put her to sleep. When I wanted to fight, my older brother always oblige me with kicks in the pants and slaps in the face. My mother thought I was an eediot when I was a child, but my father say, 'She is not an eediot. The child is just theenking.' I was always peetcher on the baseball team."

"I have been here for five years. I came from Ireland. I was married once to an Irishman named McFeeters. He was a very nice fellow, but it was one of those things you do when you are seventeen and you don't know very much."

Following the McFeeters episode, she had married a Frenchman, the actor Jean-Pierre Aumont. She brought out a photograph of him and showed it to us. "I saw heem for the first time on October the first, 1943, at five o'clock in the afternoon at Chicago in the Dearborn Station," she told me. "I even tell you to the second when I saw heem; it was the same second I fall in love with heem, boom." Montez has been accused of acting even when she is asleep, but she wasn't acting when she told us about Jean-Pierre.

She put the picture away. "He was with the French First Army in Africa, then in Italy. Now he is in France. I take exercise three or four times a week to help pass the time until he comes back. I even take stim baths. I read a book and say thees war will be over sometime, but it doesn't help." Looking past me at the window, she said, "When I come to New York, the man who ran the Monte Carlo night club told me I should be in peectures. He introduced me to agents, producers and artists. RKO paid for dramatic and diction lessons for me. Then Universal brought me out here.

"I need an awful lot of money. I always have a lot of pipples on

my shoulder. Every month I sign checks for ten or eleven pipple. I've got a business manager, but he is tight with me. He says, 'You can't geeve away more than four hundred dollaire a month.' . . . I like women. I like them for the good they can do for you if they want to. On the other hand, there are some women who don't like you, no matter what you do. I theenk if somebody would open a school to teach women to love, there would be fewer divorces. I have talked to American girls about these theengs, and their ideas of love-making are very strange. Like dry ice."

The conversation went back to pictures she had been in. "Every time I begin to emote, I look up and there is a horse—stealing my scene," she said with distaste.

Maskel remarked that she might as well hand in her resignation at the studio if this sort of thing kept up.

Maria asked her, "Do you want me to say to heem, 'I love America. America loves me. I am very grateful'? Or do you want me to put my thumb in my mouth and say, 'At the studio we are one beeg happy family'?"

Maskel was game. "Maria not only writes, she reads quite a lot too," she told me.

Maria said, "St. Thomas Aquinas is my favorite. I read heem three or four times a year."

I got to my feet to say good-by. "I never put up a front with newspaper pipple," Maria said. "They want to do a good story, and I want a good story about me too. So that make two of us."

Looking wan, Maggy Maskel stood up too. I said something about sending a photographer out to take pictures. "I fit a sarong pretty well," Montez admitted. "But you wouldn't believe the dialogue they geeve me. Finally I tell them, 'Geeve me a stop watch, and every minute on the minute I weel say, "Ugh!"' If that is what they want I have nothing against twelve-year-olds, but I wish somebody else beside twelve-year-olds would come to see my peectures. I read a screen play recently about a bad girl who dies, but Grable will probably get it. Me, I would like to play Lucrezia Borgia or Joan of Arc in Spanish."

Together with a number of others who have had to handle the prickly assignment of taking care of the Montez contacts with the public and the press, Maskel really likes her. Said one of Universal's publicity-department people, "She is generous to a fantastic degree. She wants you to partake of all the good things she has, even her belief in astrology. If she thinks you look down in the mouth, she says, 'You go see my astrologer. He weel feex you up like shooting docks in a rain barrel.'"

It would be scarcely fair to say of Maria Montez, as one wit said of Katharine Hepburn after watching her performance in the stage play, *The Lake*, that she runs the gamut of human emotions only from *A* to *B*. Montez is no Ingrid Bergman, but she is capable of running anybody's gamut ragged, certainly from *M*, for "Montez," to *S*, for "sex."

It would be interesting to see what Montez could do with a role different from the *How-dare-you-spik-to-me-zat-way-do-you-not-know-I-am-the-Queen-of-Egypt* parts that have been her portion. She might fall flat on her determined puss while trying it, but at least the role would know it had been given a wrestle.

Some day someone may succeed in selling La Montez on displaying one-half the fire in front of a camera that she leaves in her dressing-room battles, or one-quarter of the hotcha she displays in her own home. If that ever happens, she might even find herself acclaimed as an actress instead of a one-girl riot.

But whether or not Montez is always stimulating at the box-office, she is invariably that to a reporter on the receiving end of an interview. A month after the story I wrote about her appeared in print, she dispatched a telegram to me. She just wanted to tell me that she no longer needed to take cold showers or read dull books to keep her mind on her work and off of her husband. He had come home from the wars.

3. *Upper Crusters*

This book is written in the belief that movie-goers have been growing up. That by and large they are becoming mental adults—mobs of bobby-soxers and autograph hounds making a rackety nuisance of themselves at previews and personal appearances to the contrary.

For that reason, I have not been wholly concerned with the dimple that splits the chin of the latest King of Swoon, or the cleavage displayed by the cinema's most bountifully equipped hyper-mammillary. It would be naive to suppose that these matters will ever become matters of public disinterest (even to those who mix Toynbee with Ty Power) and no attempt has been made to eliminate them from these pages. It is merely that (outside of fan-fodder magazines) there is more to Hollywood than Jane Russell's muscle. Much more!

There are, for example, those who make movies as well as those who appear in them. Some of these are stylists. The stylists are the top of Hollywood's upper crust. The test of a stylist is that you can walk in to see a movie he's made and know that he made it, without benefit of marquee or screen-credit hint as to who put the picture together, just as in reading a page from a book by Hemingway or Willa Cather or Damon Runyon, you know who wrote it without looking at the title page. Lubitsch had such a style. Capra has it. Hitchcock has it; John Ford has it. Actually, whether you rate his style as art or not, Joe Pasternak has it.

It's the deft touch they give the dialogue, the uncanny insight with

which the stylists insert a situation, a bit of screen business, the twist they give the plot, that makes all the difference. It's quite a difference!

In this portion of this book I've written about three men who have given style to their pictures: writer-producer Nunnally Johnson, director-producer Leo McCarey, the late producer, Mark Hellinger.

Within the last few years, producers have begun to stop just being men who walk around with big cigars in their mouths, busying themselves with mysterious and hard to define duties. They have assumed a much more potent part in film making. If one picture turned out by a producer has style, it may be because of the writer who wrote it or the director who directed it. But if three or four pictures fashioned by that same producer possess an easily identifiable quality (regardless of who wrote it or who directed it) it's only fair to attribute that identifiable quality to him. Johnson, McCarey, and Hellinger all passed this test, *magna cum laude*. Their minds dominate their pictures.

Hellinger trademarked his pictures with violence and a stark verisimilitude. The Hitchcock brand is silken suspense. Whether his product is a whodunnit (*Woman in the Window*), a film of social significance (*The Grapes of Wrath*), or a comedy of domestic give-and-take (*Holy Matrimony*), the Johnson film stigmata is wit, satire, and dialogue that contains both of these ingredients.

For over two years I worked at getting Johnson down on paper. In that time I talked to nearly thirty-five people about him. I typed out two hundred and fifty pages of Johnsoniana. In the end I boiled those two hundred and fifty pages down to two parts and titled them with the hard-to-live-up-to label, Hollywood's Number One Wit. But it's my belief that Johnson lives up to it.

Once an old newspaper man and magazine writer himself, Johnson helped me with my lead by asking, "Why should anybody want to read about me, for God's sake? I'm not Errol Flynn!" I decided to shock the readers into attention by highlighting the fact that no one in the history of writing was ever paid so much for merely put-

ting one word after another. The letter Johnson once got from his mother in answer to one he wrote her from Hollywood seemed a provocative springboard to me.

After much sober reflection and an earnest, whispered consultation with her husband on the front porch, little Mrs. Johnson had sat down in the front room of her home in Columbus, Georgia, and composed a cautiously worded reply to her boy.

"Dear Nunnally," he read a few days later in his office at Twentieth Century-Fox Studio, "the news of your new contract is wonderful. However, I believe it would be wiser for me not to mention this new increase to anyone else in Columbus. You may remember that I wrote you once of the strange look that came into Professor Kendrick's face when I told him at a Parent-Teacher meeting that you were getting six hundred dollars a week as a writer. It was even worse when I told your aunts, May and Minnie, that you had been raised to two thousand dollars a week. Papa insists that they all just assumed I'd gone crazy, but I know better. They thought I was telling them fibs. So I'll keep quiet about this one. Columbus is not yet New York, and such salaries as they pay in Hollywood are not always understood here. If ever the situation arises where I must say something, instead of telling the truth, I shall just say you've slipped back to fifteen hundred dollars again. That would make it much simpler, unless it would hurt your feelings in some way. If so, I will state the facts truthfully, regardless of what anyone thinks."

That was in 1938. Before she died, early in 1946, Mrs. Johnson's problem reached a point that made it futile to attempt any further glossing over of her son's exasperating earning powers. At the end, as far as anyone might have known from her, her son in Hollywood was still plodding along at a wretched \$4000 a week, the last figure she allowed to pass her lips.

But the truth is that three years before this end, in 1943, Nunnally Johnson had declined the tallest contract ever offered a writer in a business skylined with skyscraper contracts. In an effort to dissuade him from launching into independent production, Twentieth

Century-Fox unsuccessfully laid before him a guarantee of \$4500 a week, fifty-two weeks a year, for five years, a total of more than \$1,000,000, and without any of those options Hollywood employers try to protect themselves with against hasty optimisms.

Mrs. Johnson might conceivably have coped with this fiscal advance, since it followed a familiar if somewhat monstrous rhythm. But two years later her son was paid \$150,000 for eight weeks of work on a screen play, a matter of \$18,645 a week, making him, for those eight weeks at least, the highest-paid writer on record in the history of the world. She recognized that a situation that was difficult to begin with had spiraled into impossible surrealism, and closed her mouth permanently on the whole subject.

There are sound practical reasons to account for her son's fat success in Hollywood. With a long list of important and richly profitable pictures to his credit, he has benefited by the growing recognition of the writer as the prime factor in the creation of screen entertainment, until today he is without question the country's No. 1 screen writer; the most reliable box-office man in the business.

For the movies, whatever other claims they may make, are still primarily big business. Every picture released is another sizable financial project involving anywhere from several hundred thousands of dollars to several millions.

It is subject to the nervous hazards and worrisome uncertainties that any other large, orthodox business venture is heir to. A movie producer doesn't like to lose money any more than a banker. So, as the safest and cheapest insurance against commercial misfortune, he endeavors to hire the biggest star, the most successful director and the most dependable writer he can find.

"And the answer to every producer's prayer," said Abel Green, editor of *Variety*, writing of the rise of the writer in Hollywood, "is Nunnally Johnson."

Not only is Johnson the most dependable but he is probably the fastest top-line writer in Hollywood. He makes only two pictures a year now, but he has done as many as four. No major studio counts on the delivery of a completed script in much under four

months. The average for pictures of any consequence is nearer six, and any number of them have cost as much as three years in time, effort and money. Over the years, Johnson's pace for script writing has been a consistent ten weeks, and his finished product rarely calls for any serious revision. In many cases, so confident are the producers and directors of his reliability that his pictures have gone into production before he has turned in the final sequence.

He is, moreover, a craftsman of extraordinary variety. The story editor of a major studio once said of him, "He can do any kind of story you like. There is no one else in the business who can do so many different kinds of pictures so well." His first picture, *Mama Loves Papa*, was a stucco-bungalow comedy; his most recent, *The Dark Mirror*, a melodrama. In between, he has corned it up with Cantor, leered with Chevalier and galloped over the purple sage with Gary Cooper. His *Jesse James* was a ten-twenty-thirty Western, *The House of Rothschild* a tough and angry biography, *Thanks a Million* a satirical musical. The Johnson pictures, *Holy Matrimony* and *The Pied Piper*, were comedies of warmth and tenderness. Like Steinbeck's novel, his movie version of *The Grapes of Wrath* was a drama of deep compassion. *Banjo on My Knee* was right out of the cracker barrel. In *Café Metropole*, even the bums wore black ties.

The probability is that every man, woman and child who has ever patronized a movie theater in this country or England has at one time or another laughed, smiled, wept or at least looked at a picture written or fashioned in some part by this Columbus, Georgia, boy. But it is the financial complexion of this record of entertainment that has had most to do with making him the Coal-Oil Johnny of Letters in Hollywood. The box office is still the pay-off in show business. Of the thirty-six pictures he has written or produced—or both—during his thirteen years in the studios, only three have failed to make money. The thirty-three others have run a hearty gamut of profit, from the stout little percentage earned by *Mama Loves Papa* to the huge nets of *The House of Rothschild*, *Jesse James*, *The*

Grapes of Wrath, and The Woman in the Window. The sum of their grosses is a prodigious \$100,000,000.

How far this professional importance of his has penetrated into the consciousness of a world movie audience is hard to say. His is still the only screen writer's name likely to be lighted on marquees with those of the stars of his pictures. Money-minded exhibitors esteem the Johnson label. But such is the obscurity of even the most celebrated members of his craft that his name is sometimes mistaken for that of the minor actor who played the heroine's lovable old scamp of an uncle. Popular recognition is not necessarily among the lush rewards in the fields of cinema literary labor.

But no matter how expensive he may be, a reliable A-One script writer is a demonstrable economy. There are hundreds of writers in Hollywood who are good for a few lines, a scene or two, or even a number of sequences, but only a handful who can be counted on to go the full distance. "Any time a producer can get Norman Krasna for his story," said Johnson, "he is not only going to save money but he is also going to be able to build up his health again with long hours of untroubled rest and relaxation, for the most complex of his problems has been solved. He knows that when the day comes for shooting, the script will be ready and so nearly exactly right that any amendments will be a mere matter of routine. The same is true of Lamar Trotti, Charley Brackett and Billie Wilder, Dudley Nicholas, Phil and Julius Epstein, Claude Binyon and Ben Hecht. Whatever a producer has to pay, he is lucky if he can lure Lillian Hellman, Charley MacArthur or Robert E. Sherwood out from New York. They are all money in the bank."

Once, when a studio sought Johnson to adapt a story for its biggest star, Johnson's agent, Johnny Hyde, set a price that made the studio recoil as if kicked by a mule. But before it could answer, Hyde produced a set of figures on the writing costs of each of the star's five previous productions. In each case the story had been gone over and over and over again, each new writer adding another sum to the budget, until the total cost of the finished script appreciably exceeded the amount Hyde asked for Johnson. Assuming that the

script done by Johnson would be final and satisfactory—and he has seldom failed—Hyde pointed out that the studio would actually be saving money by paying him what he asked. The deal was made. The picture was a success. The studio did save money.

Johnson explains his eminence in the fiscal standing of writers by saying, "There's no need for admirers of Shakespeare to sulk over this situation. Shakespeare simply never had Johnny Hyde making his deals."

When Johnson turned down Twentieth Century-Fox's fanciest contract three years ago, it was to set himself up as an independent producer. In partnership with William Goetz, one of his old bosses at Twentieth, and Leo Spitz, long a prominent figure in major studio operation, he has since written and produced pictures under his own banner. His take is half the profits these pictures make. By mutual consent, his participation in this project is confined entirely to the making of the pictures. For, in spite of his long association with large sums, Johnson as a businessman leaves much to be desired. In fact, according to those who have witnessed his efforts in that role, few adults leave more.

"Johnson's shrewdness in business affairs," David Hempstead, a fellow producer, once declared, "is such that he can walk up to any soda fountain and get a ten-cent drink for as little as a quarter."

His presence now in a world of debentures, amortizations and other such mysteries of corporate structure is not a development that might have been easily predicted. His background is largely newspaper work, and while an environment of printer's ink and deadlines includes many interesting features, the opportunity to become familiar with Wall-Street-sized chunks of money is not one of them. As a schoolboy he was deficient in arithmetic, and as a youth he failed the entrance examinations to both West Point and Annapolis through this same weakness. Even as a reporter he was rated low as a calculator. Often he was unable to figure himself in for even a new hat on an expense account for a three-day out-of-town assignment. As late as 1930, a New York bank where he had a checking account placed him, along with Frank Sullivan, then a fellow re-

porter, and the late Robert Benchley, in a special category reserved for clients needing constant supervision, due in part to a habit of writing checks late at night in strange speak-easies.

As long as his income consisted of a weekly salary, he exhibited a satisfactory grasp of the economics involved. Joseph M. Schenck, chairman of the board of Twentieth Century-Fox, once described him with a sigh by saying, "Nunnally is a child with money. All he knows is that he wants more of it." During his first ten years in Hollywood, this childish approach yielded Johnson something more than \$1,000,000, all of which he understood without difficulty, because it came to him as it had come in his newspaper days, in Saturday-night dribbles.

But when he himself became a part of corporate structure, a curtain seemed to descend between him and the financial facts of his life. After one or two singlehanded efforts had failed to change, for him, the processes by which his business was organized and the pictures financed, sold and distributed, Johnny Hyde set up an elaborate educational expedition to make such matters crystal clear to his financially inept client. He brought up reinforcements in the shape of five lawyers, accountants and tax experts known for their ability to explain abstruse subjects in kindergarten language.

After a sweaty session lasting well into the evening, the one who had come nearest to success was an accountant who hit on the device of persuading Johnson to think of his transaction as a deal in bananas, a twist which appeared to give the affair some semblance of reality to him. The try failed only because, just as all was beginning to go well, the accountant made the mistake of employing one of the innumerable mathematical terms which confuse and distress Nunnally. He spoke of a "gross" of the fruit.

While trying to recollect whether a gross was 1760 or 5280, Johnson lost track of the explanation that followed, and was never again able to catch up with it. In the end, however, he smiled and nodded with the air of easy comprehension he has learned to assume when facing matters beyond his understanding. The delegation seized upon this nodding as a signal to adjourn, and in a matter of seconds

had zipped up their brief cases, shaken hands hurriedly all around, and were out of the building, mopping their brows and exchanging baffled looks.

Since then, Johnson has kept away from the witchcraft of finance. He leaves such matters to his partners and Hyde. Only occasionally, and then by accident, have even the tag ends of such operations reached through to him.

Once, two years ago, he received a call from the Bank of America. "Nunnally," a voice said, "you have an account in our Hollywood branch, haven't you?" He had. "Then it's all right to transfer the fifty-four thousand dollars there, isn't it?" Pretending that he knew what the voice was talking about, Johnson said, "It is." Fascinated by such mysterious proceedings, he nevertheless decided to say nothing about it, for fear that some simple explanation for it would hold him up again to ridicule.

Ten days later came \$70,000 more, and a week after that another \$54,000. Convinced by then that in some fantastic way the largest bank in the world was committing suicide by mistake, he bided his time, to see just how far the blunder would go before screams of horror from the bank's brass hats marked its discovery. By the end of a month, the transfers had mounted to a quarter of a million dollars, and Johnson, who at times is given to melodramatic speculation, was beginning to worry. What, he asked himself, if this were some incredibly ingenious looting of the huge bank and he himself the innocent dupe of a gang of international crooks? How could he be sure that the bank's entire \$5,600,000,000 of assets might not be siphoned out through him, and, in the final getaway, who would be more likely to be left for the law to deal with than himself?

He had just decided to lay the facts in the hands of the best criminal lawyer available when Hyde placed before him for signature a check for the total amount of the transfers, made out to a corporation Johnson had never heard of. Too relieved to ask for an explanation, he signed without question.

In time it turned out that these mysterious funds were sums of money which nobody had bothered to tell him about—sums that

were beginning to come in from a couple of pictures he had made. It was simply as a part of business routine that these sums passed through him to whoever finally got them. Possibly they were RKO's share of box-office receipts for distributing Johnson's pictures; he was never sure.

"You'll be better off," Hyde once remarked to him, "as soon as you get out from under that interest."

"What interest?" Johnson asked.

"On that two million you owe," Hyde replied.

"You'll have to go a long way," Johnson still marvels, "before you'll find another country where a man can borrow two million dollars without even knowing it."

But in some quarters Johnson enjoys an even greater celebrity, certainly a livelier one, than that for making money or pictures. Articulate, irreverent and forthright, he has left behind him on his restless trips between Hollywood and New York a paper trail of casual and careless humor that occasionally troubles as many people as it amuses. Sometimes dry, sometimes salty, nearly always derisive, it is scattered through his letters, his conversation and even his business practices. He is a far sharper observer and a much more candid commenter than Hollywood is accustomed to press to its pneumatic bosom.

"Movie actors wear dark glasses to funerals," he explains with satisfaction, "to conceal the fact that their eyes are not red from weeping."

"He has done very well indeed," he remarked of a movie magnate's fast-rising son-in-law, "for a young man who has had only his talents to depend on."

In a monotonously reprinted anecdote, Johnson explained to a fashionably ignorant woman who chose to confuse Tobacco Road with all Georgia, "Where I come from, we look on that crowd as the country-club set."

This happens to be the stuff of which Broadway columns are made. And out of such columns, gathered in the tonier saloons of New York and Hollywood and dispatched daily to nearly every city

and town in the country, comes a tight little fame for the Quotables. The Quotables are a curious group whose wit and humor, casual or efforted, provide the raw material for the chroniclers of trivia. Thence, in large part, came the Quotations of Benchley, George S. Kaufman, Oscar Levant, Dorothy Parker, and such others.

It is Johnson's nature to answer almost every reasonable demand with a Quotable. His name is identifiable. His conversation is caustic, wry and sentimental in about equal parts. He is outspoken to the point of indiscretion. And it is not impossible to think of him in a saloon.

An abstemious man of recent years, he once, in the pleasant old expression, dearly loved a song and a glass, and like his idol, Ring Lardner, he preferred them in a tavern, where the service, consumption and hours of arrival and departure are more flexible than in the formal confines of a home.

He claims to be able to trace more than half the pleasures of his whole life to the sociability found in the barrooms he has patronized from Key West to Seattle, and fully three quarters of his professional accomplishments to the inspiration and enlightenment to be discovered only, he insists, in such hospitable shelters. Nor does he eschew them now; only their stronger water.

And by way of final qualification as a Quotable, his reputation for humor, written as well as spoken, is of long standing, reaching back through many pre-Hollywood years of newspaper and magazine writing.

This qualification is vouched for by Harold Ross, editor of *The New Yorker*, who wrote of him last year, "He is one of the six humorists in the country." Ross couldn't resist adding sourly, "Johnson is also sickening, from my standpoint, for he has been sucking around the diamond merchants of Hollywood for the last fifteen years and hasn't written anything. There is a misspent life."

In Hollywood, a good deal of this humor, which is an odd combination of cheerfulness and cynicism, has been aimed at lightening *The Job*. Johnson suffers constantly from a nervous fear that *The Job* is in some way going to encroach on the main purpose of a

man's life, which is enjoyment, and particularly does he regard this as a danger in Hollywood, where the making of pictures is for the most part a grim and humorless business.

"Never in my life," Nicholas Schenck observed once, after a walk around his Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio, "have I seen so many unhappy men making a hundred thousand dollars a year."

To guard himself against any such fate, Johnson's production organizations, first with David Hempstead at Twentieth Century-Fox and later with Goetz, both high-spirited characters, have been distinguished by an amiable unorthodoxy designed to reduce earnestness and efficiency to a minimum. Once at Twentieth Century-Fox, when an unprecedented pressure of production had held the personnel strictly to business longer than usual, Johnson felt it necessary to pause long enough to offer some form of apology for the imposition. It was a bulletin distributed to the young ladies of the organization:

SUBJECT: FRIENDSHIP

During the present urgency of work, occasioned by the fact that the Cannonball Unit has eight pictures in preparation or production, the men members will be unable to make the customary passes at the girls. This is not to be taken as in any way as a reflection on the quality or attractiveness of the young ladies, and certainly no falling off in the susceptibility and aggressiveness of the braves. It is simply an emergency measure, and I feel sure that all will co-operate and stand together to face the situation with the same courage that, in another day, we faced meatless Thursday and sugarless weeks.

This is not to be taken, however, as a license for the girls to promenade boldly through the corridors and leer in the doors of other units. Every girl loyal to the Cannonball Unit, every girl holding herself true-blue to the standards we have striven to build up in the old organization, will hold herself in readiness, day or night, for an immediate and unannounced resumption of the old order.

THE COMMISSAR.

To cheer themselves up when *The Grapes of Wrath* lost out on the Academy Award, Johnson and Hempstead designed and had

cast for themselves their own Oscar, identical with the more legitimate trophy, except that the skimpily clad little fellow wore a derby hat. Not caring, however, to be too specific as to their qualifications for this consolation prize, they contented themselves with the simple claim, engraved on the base "For being twenty-two years and six months ahead of their time."

Two years ago, badgered, as what Hollywood producer is not, by requests for advice and criticism, he tried to minimize such interruptions by hanging on the wall outside the door a framed schedule of OFFICE FEES:

For reading a story, with a one word comment.....	\$5 a page
For same, without comment	\$10 a page
*For listening to a story while dozing	\$500
For listening to a story jovially described as "just a springboard"	\$10,000
For listening to a story while wide awake.....	\$1,000
For reading stories, plays or scripts written by actors or actresses to star themselves	\$25,000
For attending amateur performances in a converted shoe store on Highland Avenue to "catch" promising new material	\$10,000 and transportation
For looking at talented children.....	\$500
For talking to same or their mothers.....	\$50,000
For meeting "new faces," male.....	\$100
For same, female	\$1
For same, female, door closed.....	No charge
* In cases of close friends or warm acquaintances acquired in saloons late the night before, charges are doubled.	

Because he is, singularly enough, a writer who actually likes to write, Johnson is constantly at it, and, as there is rarely place in movie scripts for the kind of odds and ends of material he learned to accumulate as a newspaper columnist, he uses it in letters to friends, few of which seem ever to have been lost or thrown away; in articles for all kinds of publications, generally obscure and limited in circulation; and in other such unprofitable but diverting ways.

In a letter to Joel Sayre, an old friend, he wrote an amusing and

discerning commentary on what the average person considers one of the secrets of placing a piece of writing with a national publication.

Dear Joe: That New Yorker story of yours is a honey. A half dozen people have mentioned it, on all sides.

NUNNALLY.

P.S. Of course it is no secret that your wife is connected with The New Yorker, and if my wife were connected with a magazine, I would not be at all surprised if I got any old thing I wrote in it either, because the way magazines are run these days, where are you if you have not got a wife working for a magazine or any kind of "pull" like that? Nowhere. I have no "pull," and without "pull" you might just as well give up, because everything in New York is logrolling and back-scratching and they like anything each other wrote and praise it to beat the band and put it in their magazines, no matter what, and if the rest of the country don't like it, they can just lump it, that's all, but say I wrote a story, a good story, what am I going to do with it if I haven't any "pull," like a wife connected with a magazine? I might just as well go and read it to a bus driver while he is driving down Fifth Avenue and be done with it, because that's all it's going to get me. But if I have a wife connected with a magazine and she simpers around the editor, oh, me, oh, my, oh, my, my hubby has written a story, well, naturally the editor is going to say, okay, let's see this wonderful story your hubby has written, and the next thing you know, he is going to buy the story, whose money is it, the stockholders, and what they don't know won't hurt them, and the story is in the magazine and everybody is like sheep, everybody goes around yammering, oh, my, what a story, and nobody says how that story got accepted by the wife through her "pull." But I am no fool. I have not watched the mag game for nothing. I spotted the system a long time ago. It's just pull, pull, pull, and the hell with talent or even genius. Now, you know, Joe, this is not to take anything away from your story, it wasn't a bad story at all, but you know and I know that it don't hurt to have a friend at court, put in a word here and there in the right places, grease the way, as it were, even Joseph Conrad wouldn't mind a little lift like that. Anyway, congrats, and you lucky dog, you. Pretty soft. That's what I said the other day. I said, does that guy get the breaks? Well, so long, Joe. All of the best.

Although there is no actual resemblance, Johnson reminds many people of Lee Tracy when Tracy appeared on Broadway in *The Front Page*. "A little like a bad-looking Tracy," Earl Wilson, a Broadway columnist, described him, "a little like a good-looking Burton Rascoe."

The suggestion is probably occupational, in an indirect fashion, for Johnson is an ex-newspaperman who still looks, talks and thinks as much like a reporter as he can. His closest friends are still out of his years in New York city rooms, and most of those he has acquired since, whatever their businesses or professions, have an air of once having followed the same calling. Magazine writing and movie work were both afterthoughts in his life. From the day he saw his first picture of Richard Harding Davis dressed to cover a battle, thirty-five years ago, he knew what he wanted to be.

Yale tempted him briefly—through Frank Merriwell—and after high school he thought long and seriously of professional baseball. Tall and fast, he was a first baseman until he noticed that only the names of the batteries were printed in the papers in the brief notices given to school games, whereupon he became a catcher. But a weakness at bat convinced him that a career in that direction was not likely to carry him very far. He tried for West Point and Annapolis only for the higher education he would not be able to afford otherwise. But through all else, the picture of Davis remained bright and clear in his heart, lighting the way to New York and a world in which a reporter rested between wars in the company of the beautiful young Miss Ethel Barrymore or like Davis, married the entrancing Miss Bessie McCoy.

Even now he has a recurring dream which involves a clean break with the present, and a start all over again at the very bottom of the ladder of journalism, a dream which Mrs. Johnson, who was an actress and has no moony feeling for newspapers and newspaper work, listened to with horror the first time her husband told it to her.

"First we drop this whole business, everything," he explained; "just walk right out and never think of it again. We go then to the

smallest, most rural county seat we can find, and there we start a little country weekly. For a while it will probably be a little tough even to make ends meet, but we're both strong and courageous, aren't we?"

"No," replied Mrs. Johnson firmly.

"Well, anyway, we stick to it through thick and thin, with barely enough to eat at times, until finally hard work, long hours and plain living win out and we turn the corner. Think of the thrill it'll be the first week we check the books on Saturday night and find ourselves a dollar or two ahead!"

"I will try," Mrs. Johnson said.

"Meanwhile—now get this!—I will have been making, in a quiet way, something of a reputation for myself—another William Allen White!—wise, kindly, genial, never too busy to pause and pat a dog or a horse on the head—a wonderfully shrewd country editor of the old school whose penetrating paragraphs have begun to be picked up and reprinted in the city papers, until presently the biggest paper in the state sends for me to do a column of wise and salty comment to bear some such folksy head, I imagine, as *UNCLE NUN SEZ*. Our over-all loss on the venture so far is about half of our savings, but what does that matter when we're on the move and in a fight again?"

"What, indeed?"

"The column is an immediate and sensational success—a new voice, like a breath of clean, fresh country air. Everywhere the plain people, the backbone of the nation, begin to look to me for the word."

"Why?"

"Because I am one of them! I speak straight from a simple and honest heart, and that's the kind of language the common man understands."

"Go on."

"And then—New York! One year exactly from the day we left the county seat, the column, under its new head, *MR. JOHNSON STATES*, makes its bow on the front page of the greatest paper in the

greatest city in the world. Everything that has gone before pales into insignificance beside what happens now. Four networks are after me. I laugh at 'em. A transcript of my stuff is on the President's breakfast tray every morning. I just yawn. Baruch calls, but I am on the wire to Moscow at the moment, discussing a certain matter with a certain party in the Kremlin whose name I do not feel free to divulge just now."

"Some woman?"

"They simply won't let me alone. And look what's happened! In one short year, from the very deep-down bottom, with only the hands and the head that God gave me, I've reached the top at last. From the Voice of the People to the Voice of America. The country has seen nothing like it since Benjamin Franklin. Nor is that all! One month after I get to New York, what do you think?"

"What?"

"Hollywood signs me again!"

Back in the tempestuous '20's, when a mass madness called the bull market addled the nation's mind, and new flagpole-sitting records were established almost weekly, a bizarre Hollywood custom added its quota to the prevailing dizziness. Actors and actresses, hell-bent to leave their footprints in wet concrete outside of Grauman's Chinese Theater, were brought west with all the panoply and lush hoopla of a traveling maharajah.

A classic pageantry also attended even the importation of writers from New York to Hollywood. After a jubilant announcement of the historic signing, anxious representatives hastened to escort the captive to his flower-decked drawing room aboard *The Twentieth Century*. In Chicago he was transferred to equally de luxe quarters on *The Chief*, along with baskets of fruit and fine wines and spirits to make pleasant his hours across plain and mountain. At Pasadena he was lifted into a limousine and transported to a large, sunny bungalow, already prepared on the grounds of the most luxurious hotel in Los Angeles. The industry's most trustworthy bootlegger awaited him on the threshold, order pad and pencil poised. And all this was on the house.

Even in the early, tremulous '30's the bill for red carpeting was still a considerable item on the studios' budgets. But Screen Writer Nunnally Johnson's 1932 journey into Golconda was not like this. In his case the cinema's crystal ball must have been clouded. Otherwise the seers in the studio's genius departments would have foreseen that the stony-broke, puckish young man with the South in his mouth was destined to be one of the most successful writers of motion-picture scripts ever to set foot in a land where even the motels look like platinum-pinnacled Shangri-Las.

In all fairness, it was difficult for anyone in the film capital to foresee that the ex-newspaperman and short-story writer who had had to borrow his train fare west would tap out thirty-odd screen plays in the next fourteen years, and that those thirty-odd films, between them, would gross more than \$100,000,000. If anyone had told the screen moguls that their latest importation would write the film versions of such successes as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Pied Piper*, *Holy Matrimony*, *Jesse James*, and *The House of Rothschild*, such prophets would have been hooted out of town. Not even Johnson himself, although he approached the California gold coast confidently enough, had any idea that during one eight-week stretch in 1944 he would be paid more for writing than any screen writer ever earned in the history of the industry, or that in 1943 he would turn down an offer of \$4500 a week—the highest yearly salary ever offered a writer anywhere—to stay on with Twentieth Century-Fox as a writer-producer.

The best that Paramount, his first employer, was able to bring itself to do was a dour agreement that if he should present himself at the studio gate he would be admitted. That was all. So ignorant was he of movie protocol that he didn't even get off at Pasadena to complete his journey in the back seat of a chauffeur-driven auto, a bit of swank even script girls affect. "I found that the real quality got off at San Bernardino," he said later. "The cream of the bottle must have got off at Kansas City."

Born in Columbus, Georgia, on December 5, 1897, he approached Hollywood by way of various first World War Army camps,

and a series of newspaper city rooms. Although his present home in Beverly Hills, with interior decoration designed by William Haines—the movie colony's splashiest interior decorator—is a far cry from his modest Columbus beginnings, his Georgia origin is still no secret to anyone who comes within earshot. According to Charles Brackett, another writer-producer (*Lost Weekend*), Johnson is the only man ever heard of who not only speaks rapidly in a rich Southern accent but who can actually splutter in it.

His mother was a beautiful young woman who was shyly pleased when told she looked like Maude Adams. His father was a rambling young railroad man who, by some strange chance, found himself, one Sunday, in the church where she sang in the choir—Jerusalem the Golden—and thereupon stopped rambling. A widower now, he still lives where he stopped, the most thoroughly retired man of whom there is any record in Georgia.

"I am quite satisfied with a lawn that doesn't grow very well," he recently informed his son. "If it grew, it would simply be a monotony of grow and mow, grow and mow, grow and mow, eternally, and I am not much interested in such a squirrel-cage existence."

The idea of written drama was first suggested to Nunnally by his younger brother, Pat, who was suddenly inspired to begin a scrawled playscript with the striking statement: "Pat and Nunnally are out shooting Yankees." This turned out to be less a matter of unreconstruction than of confusion. The younger Johnson was under the impression that Yankees were a species of game fowl, like wild turkeys.

After his graduation from high school, the Columbus Enquirer Sun took Nunnally on as a cub reporter. Newspaper work proved to be a pretty country for the road to Hollywood to pass through, and Johnson tarried in it off and on, for nearly fifteen years.

He reached the newspaperman's promised land, New York, a month after he emerged from World War I as a second lieutenant of field artillery. He worked, in turn, for the old New York Tribune, the Brooklyn Eagle and the New York Post, covering such stories as

the Wall Street bomb explosion in 1920, the Hall-Mills case, the Scopes—Darwin vs. Genesis—trial at Dayton, Tennessee, and the grimy Ruth Snyder-Judd Gray sash-weight murder case. For the Post and Eagle he sweated as a roving reporter and did a column of stories of his own choice to boot. "Johnson was a good reporter," said Stanley Walker, then city editor of the Herald Tribune, "at times even a great one."

During the Eagle period he was married twice, both times to girl reporters on the paper. "It was an occupational risk for women on the Eagle in those days," he explains. "In both cases we parted amiably enough, and I got custody of the mother-in-law."

In 1925 he sold his first short story. Thereafter he became a phenomenally successful magazine writer. His name was on their covers and his stories were listed in the fancier tables of contents—he sold fifty-two short stories to The Saturday Evening Post without a rejection. He was able eventually to cut himself loose from newspaper work and spend all his time on fiction. But in 1932, starved for advertising, the magazines started to grow thinner. With the writing market halved, somebody had to suffer. Johnson, for one. What with alimony to pay, a new family to support, a house on Long Island rapidly tobogganing back to the mortgage holders, and a notorious inability to understand the complexities of even so simple a thing as balancing a checkbook, he was reduced to dodging his Miami, Florida, landlord. It was then that he turned his eyes westward toward the Hollywood fleshpots.

He had eyed pictures before, unencouraged. Twice he had tapped ineffectively at Hollywood's door. A movie executive had taken him to the coast for six weeks of trial in a studio search for new writers, an experimental junket known to those in New York newspaper haunts as The Paramount Fresh Air Fund for Reporters. But it was an ironclad rule of the period that no executive should cooperate in any way with any other executive in the same studio, so Johnson spent the six weeks in anterooms.

The following year he worked for a few weeks on a picture being made in New York. It was directed by Frank Capra, afterward

an Academy Award winner, and marked Capra's graduation from slapstick to features. It had the further distinction of introducing to pictures a young actress named Claudette Colbert. Their combined efforts resulted in *Love O' Mike*, a celluloid ill wind that blew no one good. It wafted Johnson back to his newspaper, Capra back to slapstick and Miss Colbert back to the footlights, delaying for three years her eventually brilliant career in films.

In view of this constant iciness, Johnson had found it impossible to conceal from himself any longer a suspicion that Hollywood just wasn't interested in him. Then, in 1932, in his hour of need, with typical Hollywoodian unpredictableness, Paramount signed him. It signed him doubtingly and minus the usual flower-decked compartment on *The Chief*, but come Louella Parsons or high water, he was on the studio's salary list, which was the important thing. His pay envelope contained \$300 each week, low pay for a man who had been pulling down six or eight times that much for a single magazine-fiction job, but it was \$300 more than he had, or had any prospect of getting. On that day in 1932 when he was so unexpectedly bucketed into pictures, his mind was less on the possible literary gold to be panned in the Beverly Hills than on the immediate necessity of raising \$120 rent money. It was much as if a drowning man, grasping desperately for any straw, were suddenly to find himself fished into a cabin cruiser stocked with champagne and Varga girls.

Johnson wrote a few pictures in which Maurice Chevalier, Charles Ruggles and Mary Boland were involved. They were bright and good-humored films, and, for B pictures, unusually successful. So successful were they that Darryl Zanuck—then at Warner Brothers—sent for him, offered him an increase in salary and put him to work. His first two pictures for Zanuck were *The House of Rothschild* and *Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back*. When asked to write the screen play *The House of Rothschild*, he was startled. *Rothschild* was a "movie with a message"—against anti-Semitism—and Johnson thought of himself simply as a storyteller, not as one of the message-at-the-end boys. His forte, he felt, was comedy; the kind of

nonsense in which people with putty noses fell into flour barrels, and women, caught in a closed door, found themselves suddenly stripped to their filmy underthings. Pinching himself, he asked Zanuck, "Are you sure you haven't got me mixed up with somebody else?" Darryl was sure, and the Zanuck faith paid off. The House of Rothschild was one of the successes of its year.

In 1935 Zanuck persuaded Nunnally to accept a contract as an assistant producer. But, despite the golden flood his films brought into the till, Johnson felt he wasn't getting anywhere. His fingers itched for a pencil or a typewriter. "I couldn't work with writers," he said. "There was a script by another man on my desk, but I just couldn't open it. So I took off for Miami Beach and stayed there for five weeks. The longer I stayed, the more I viewed Hollywood with horror. Suddenly, like a sea gull lighting on my head in a Rickenbacker life-raft movie, the answer came to me. I didn't want to be a producer of other people's movies. I was a writer. That was my trouble. I told Zanuck, and he asked, 'Would you mind producing your own pictures—the ones you write the scripts for, yourself?' From then on, I was a happy man."

Once in a while Zanuck forgot himself and tossed somebody else's script over Nunnally's transom. Nunnally tossed it right back.

In 1944, when he left Twentieth Century-Fox to establish his own company, he refused an offer of more than \$1,000,000 to stay put on the Twentieth Century-Fox lot for five years.

For a dozen years, while writing or producing over thirty pictures, Johnson has apparently never been too busy to turn this bland humor on his business or himself either. But usually it is more sardonic. The truth is that for all his facetiousness he has a deep respect for moving pictures as a medium of expression and is constantly irritated by the shoddiness of many of the industry's practices and practitioners. He resents them personally, even angrily, but as a satirist he would, of course, rather be found dead than angry in print.

Writers, directors and producers, movie epics, publicity men and methods, advertising, and gossip writers—all have been favored with

his derisive attention in local journals, trade sheets, small magazines, New York newspapers, and sometimes, in lieu of anything better, simply in bulletins for his own organizations.

His first shower of darts was against his own colleagues, the writers. A moody reflection that pictures were mostly so stereotyped that from a line or two of dialogue the entire plot was instantly recognizable led to a compendium of examples. It was entitled *The Compleat Dialogue Writer* and is probably the most quoted and certainly the most copied and imitated of any of his compositions.

But, mummy, if daddy loves you, why does he make you cry?

Wal, stranger, I ain't alookin' fur trouble, but ef trouble comes alookin' fur me, wal, I guess I won't be too hard to find.

What are you trying to do—break up the act?

That's why I went away—to see how much you cared.

Why are you, a stranger, doing this for me?

Thickish out, what?

Steady the Buffs!

I say, old boy.

Righto!

Dessay lot of rot, but if anything happens——

Stout fella!

Say pip-pip to Di, will you, like a good lad?

Righto!

Well, cheerio!

Cheerio! (Bang!)

What do you care for your wife, eh? Fifi, she lofe you, too. Come, geeve Fifi beeg kees.

This is madness! You should never have come here!

Say, Chuck, there's a little girl in the chorus that can play that part!

Me Tarzan; you Jane.

Listen, Slade. You bought up the option on Lily Belle's property because you learned the railroad was going to be built through here! Well, you ain't going to get away with it, see?

Speak, Harlan, speak! If you won't tell where you were at the hour of the murder, I will!

Stop, Marian! You don't realize what you're saying!

Harlan was with me, inspector—in my boudoir!
Oh, how blind men are!

His corrosive parodies of movie-fan-magazine writing, which appeared in Leonard Lyons' column, were close enough to the actual fatuousness of that fringe of journalism to mislead many fans into accepting them as genuine news notes.

One of the nicer friendships of Hollywood is that of Metro's beauteous young Fran Quantrell and her stand-in, Martha Frish. Classmates in high school, they lived together, just a couple of ambitious kids, when they arrived here five years ago, and, although today Fran's income is around \$15,000 a week and Martha's a modest \$35, this has never impaired their affection for each other in the least. Martha is still Fran's best friend and Fran simply adores Martha. And they still live together. Martha has a cozy little room over the garage on the Quantrell estate and Fran gives her all her cast-off clothes.

A deep bow to little starlet Mary Joy Fogarty for never having traded on the fact that she is a direct descendant of Oliver J. Fogarty, Undersecretary of Agriculture in the Benjamin Harrison Administration.

Nowhere do rumors start more quickly than in Hollywood, or from less cause, as those two cute newlyweds, Knox and Dotty Futrelle, learned for themselves only recently. Idyllically happy, the Futrelles do have their little differences, as what young married couple doesn't? But it all started as a gag one night when Dotty felled Knox with an Indian club. Falling quickly into the fun, Knox chased her through the house and to the roof, where they were laughing and tussling like a couple of mischievous kids, when Dotty screamed, "Stop it, Knox! You are breaking my arm!" That was enough for a busybody neighbor. Within twenty-four hours the rumor was all over town that the Futrelles had agreed to disagree. The truth of the matter is that Dotty has no more regular visitor at the hospital than Knox, and it was he, in fact, who was the first to autograph her cast.

This sort of Bronx-jeering was, of course, for the most part too impersonal to draw any specific resentment, but, on two notable oc-

casions in Hollywood, sharp exception was taken to Johnson's candor. The first made him the somewhat startled center of a local *cause célèbre*.

The Saturday Evening Post had bought from a free-lance writer an article on Louella Parsons, the mightiest of the town's gossip journalists, which Wesley Winans Stout, then editor, felt should be rewritten, and at his request Johnson rewrote it. But the original writer agreed to the arrangement only after a stipulation that his name, not Johnson's, should appear over the article as published.

The issue of the magazine containing The First Lady of Hollywood swept over the town like a wave of laughing gas. Stunned actors and actresses read the story twice, just to make sure their eyes had not betrayed them the first time. Hollywood folklore had always had it that Miss Parsons' frown was capable of withering a career like a blast from a Bessemer furnace and that an unkind word in her widely syndicated column was, in effect, a brief obituary. Such *lèse-majesté* as they read now could be interpreted only as an invitation to a bolt of lightning.

The article described her writing as "flawless seventh-grade prose," and even in Johnson's acknowledgments of her eminence there was a note of doubt that even that was worthwhile.

The story traced her career accurately enough, but Johnson had so basted it with his own distaste for gossip journalism and had made so small a secret of his share in the project that Miss Parsons, who is a fighter from way back, lost no time in going after him. At the same time she started suit against him and everybody else connected with the article, subsequently withdrawing it, and called in vain on Zanuck, head of production at Twentieth Century-Fox, to fire him.

"If one of my assistants had written about you like that," she insisted, "I'd have him out in the street before you could say 'Frank Robinson.'"

She credited some of Johnson's pictures to other producers, and used his name only when she found an opportunity to shake her head sadly over his inadequacies. It was a campaign of vengefulness

absorbing to Hollywood, largely because it indicated the limit of her reputed power, which fell short of affecting the writer in any way, even when she aimed a weird thrust at him through his wife.

"I saw Dorris Bowdon for the first time since her marriage to Nunnally Johnson," Miss Parsons wrote for her millions. "I've never seen a girl so changed. And she used to be so pretty."

"I'd give five years of my life," Johnson marveled when he read this, "to be able to shoot around corners like that."

A year and a half later, they met for the first time at a dinner party and made up. Johnson politely offered a blanket expression of regret for everything, but Miss Parsons made it plain in the truce that she retracted but one item. She apologized to him and Mrs. Johnson for the shot at the latter. But everything else, she informed him, stood.

On the second occasion, mass exception was taken to a remark attributed to him in both a news weekly and a picture magazine. "The director's chief function," he was quoted as saying, "is to see that the actors don't go home before five o'clock." The Screen Directors' Guild as a body took formal recognition of this flippant reflection on the importance of their responsibilities and set it down in the official minutes that they resented it. They saw in Johnson's facetiousness, which was as much of a shock to them as his irreverence had been to Miss Parsons' subjects, another straw in the wind, another unhappy sign against the sky. Some were indignant enough to pledge themselves never to work with him. Others—among them directors who had already worked with him, such as John Ford, Irving Pichel and Sam Wood—dismissed the matter with a shrug and a smile.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, hello, Nunnally," Leo McCary, director of *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*, greeted him the day after the meeting of protest.

Actually the statement was one that Johnson had made of a particular director, but to those who knew him, it had a familiar ring. The truth was that he was genuinely shocked, when he first arrived in Hollywood, at the role of the writer in pictures. To him, it was

not far from menial. The man of importance was the director. The writer functioned in many ways simply as his clerk. From the very first, Johnson's back stiffened at this relationship.

"I don't pretend that my scripts are carved out by Gutzon Borglum," Johnson explained once to a director, "but I do like to talk over any changes anyone may have in mind."

The contest for predominance in the making of a picture is still waged between the writer and the director, but now on terms more nearly even. The writer's star has steadily ascended during the last ten years, Johnson's being notable evidence of the trend. With other first-rank writers, he has insisted on more and more authority, and more and more have producers become inclined to give it to them. And while other such top men as John Huston, Billie Wilder, Preston Sturges, George Seaton and Joseph Mankiewicz have also taken over the direction of the pictures they have written, the directors have little more than held their own.

But the fight that Johnson has apparently adopted as his lifework is not against Hollywood, but for it. His intramural captiousness, he explains, is a family affair. The members have every right to raise as much hell with each other as they wish, but the outsider who lifts his voice in criticism of the movies might as well prepare himself for a sharp reply from Johnson. He has jousted with critics and politicians, newspapers and magazines, against the stage and the radio, arguing constantly the cause and possibilities of the screen as a medium of expression, enlightenment and even art.

"Hollywood is every public man's pigeon," he declares. "There is no editorial writer so dull that he can't straighten out the movies on an average of four times a year. There is no preacher who can't get at least three rousing sermons annually out of Hollywood. There is not even a congressman so benighted that he can't speak with confidence on what ought to be done about that business out there. Surely somebody ought to talk back.

"Not that this situation itself hasn't its usefulness," he grants. "A man in Opelika, Alabama, goes out into the barn and throws a stout rope over a scantling. He is a failure. Life has finally licked him

but good. He can't make a living, he can't keep a wife, he isn't even competent enough to be elected to public office. If he could even think of one idea, no matter how small or insignificant, of which he could feel he was master, but no, he's gone over his list time and time again, and he knows now that he knows literally from nothing. He is a complete and indisputable cipher. Then, with the noose already tightening around his gullet, he suddenly remembers Hollywood. Removing the rope, he gets down off the barrel and walks out into the world again a new man, with new strength. There is a subject on which he is prepared to speak with authority! So, as long as Hollywood stands, no freeborn American need surrender to an inferiority complex. It is the greatest boon to psychiatrists since Sex. Hollywood," he sighs, "never gets the credit due it."

Regarding himself now as a naturalized citizen of the community and the movies, Johnson lives in Beverly Hills entirely surrounded by females. He met the third Mrs. Johnson when his secretary, Dorothy Stahl, who has been with him for ten years, appealed to him on behalf of an earnest, nervous young actress who had apparently steeled herself to sitting in his outer office until he should give in and see her.

Dorris Bowdon had been gathered up from the Louisiana State University campus by a talent scout and brought to Hollywood in a bag with Linda Darnell and Mary Healy, now a musical-comedy star on Broadway. Subsequently Miss Bowdon made memorable parts of Rosasharn in *The Grapes of Wrath* and the tragic young widow in *The Moon is Down*, but after their marriage she retired from the screen.

In addition to their two small daughters, Christie and Roxana, Johnson has two other daughters, of previous marriages, who turn up periodically. Marjorie, the older, was married two years ago to Gene Fowler, Jr., son of an old newspaper friend of Nunnally's, in a ceremony which the groom's father, who had often shared was-sail with the bride's father, described as a blend.

Excepting Roxie, the youngest, who can't even talk yet, all have had a try at writing. Marjorie once submitted to him a manuscript

entitled *The Autobiography of a Problem Child*. After reading the first three chapters, the horrified father bought it himself, which may well have been her original purpose in writing it. "My hair turned plaid when I read it," he said. Christie at five is a direct-action romantic poet, her most effective work to date being a rough but telling couplet addressed to a six-year-old roué:

*Hide the truth of our love from everybody but me
Because I'm in love with you as who can see.*

Three years ago, at the age of ten, Nora, his second child, wrote and distributed a newspaper of her own, called *Mairsy-Doats*, which was distinguished by its two-fisted fighting editorial policy, in favor of candy and against bathing.

CLEANLINESS IS NOT NEXT TO GODLINESS!

We have discovered that in the soap factory they throw the soap by bushels into dirty old tubs, they don't care what happens to it, and most of the soap you get has been left standing at least two weeks. They call it anything they can think of and the labels are mixed. Soap is impure to the body and creates a rash on the limbs.

CANDY

One of the most nutritious foodstuffs is that delicious object, manufactured all over the world, namely, candy. There are lots of kinds of candy, old-fashioned sugarplums, stick candy, molasses, fudge and candy drops. The two principal classes of candy are hard candy and soft candy and they're both good. DID YOU KNOW THAT candy and sodas and sundaes and ice cream of all kinds have more vitamins and calories than any food in the world? That fudge should be made every day to sustain life?

"Maybe one of them will really turn out to be a writer," Johnson reflects. "I'm not one myself, not really. I'm a cabinetmaker, a craftsman, a dramatizer of other people's stuff. Whatever I add is derivative at best, issuing out of another man's composition. No matter how successful this treatment may be, it's certainly not writing as I think of writing. I simply like to tell stories—mine or anybody

else's. But someday there will be true writers writing directly for the screen, and who knows but one of my kids will be among them?"

His life now among females, both the secretaries in his office and a houseful at home, is one that he would have chosen anyway, had not chance arranged it so. He frankly prefers their company to that of men, and treats them always with a concern and thoughtfulness sometimes carried to odd lengths. But the following instance is as much a reflection of his approach to most of life's problems as it is of his attitude toward women.

He was having lunch, during an interim between marriages, with a young woman who had decided that the time was at hand to reproach him for certain shortcomings which she felt were seriously affecting her life. But unaware of this solemn purpose, Johnson had ordered a carefree meal, being particularly pleased to find shad roe in season.

This he realized, once the emotional scene was launched, was a mistake, for a hearty appetite is obviously incompatible with drama. But the roe was so fresh and well cooked that he found it impossible, between sighs, to resist a slow but steady attack on it. The young woman stood this brutish behavior as long as she could.

"Look at you!" she said bitterly. "Our very lives at the crossroads, and you there smacking your lips like a pig!"

"I'm terribly sorry, honey," he assured her in genuine distress. "If I'd known it was going to be like this, believe me, I'd have ordered something I didn't like."

Such kindness and consideration was also Mark Hellinger's hallmark.

Until December, 1947, when he died, I made it a habit to drop in to see Mark Hellinger when I came to Hollywood. I talked the stuff I planned to write over with him. He paced up and down, shooting out anecdotes in a voice sandpapered to a husky smoothness on a million miles of New York's sidewalks, and pointing out pitfalls that might easily turn into pratt-falls.

It takes a while to see a story in someone you know well. The

Hellinger Story was waiting for me for months, and even years, before I got around to the idea that he himself was quite a yarn.

I worked on it for a while, then gave it up. I couldn't convince myself that I could get him into the few thousand words that limits a magazine article. Presently I was given an assist. The Saturday Evening Post's foreign editor, Martin Sommers (who had worked with Hellinger on the New York Daily News), wrote a memo to the Post's editor. The memo said that Mark Hellinger was a good subject and why didn't somebody work out on him? That jolt in the arm gave me new ambition. I filled more notebooks with Hellingeriana.

Working on the Hellinger story was a frustrating experience. He told me tales about the bizarre characters he'd known, each tale with an O. Henry snapper at its end, supplied either by Mark or by life. Then after I'd covered pages with notes, he'd say, "But of course you *can't* tell that story. It might hurt somebody."

Even when I'd finished Mark's story he still called me long distance to ask me to leave out the real name of some public enemy featured in an anecdote he'd given me. The public enemy might be dead, but even so Mark was determined not to blow the whistle on him.

Hellinger had been in Hollywood since 1936 making pictures, and there were cubs in the Stork Club cubroom to whom his name meant merely something vague such as the dim, practically prehistoric days of speakeasies, Greenwich Village when it was the Village, Marilyn Miller, and Texas Guinan. Mark, who in his day as a Broadway reporter (he was the first of the breed) had written thousands of columnar short-stories about the Street, was still an encyclopedia of its violent manners and mores of twenty years ago. The question was: Did anybody care?

He answered the question himself. He made a picture called The Killers. When he got off a transcontinental plane at LaGuardia airport with a print of the picture under his arm, one of Broadway's most eminent displaced persons had not only come home, he had come home with a bang like a burst of gunfire from a Tommy-gun

bouncing back and forth between New York's brownstone fronts. He was so proud of his picture and so worried over the reception the New York movie critics would give it, that he had insisted on bringing it East himself. *The Killers'* theme was that of gang warfare. Gang pictures had had their heyday with *Scarface*, *Little Caesar*, and *Public Enemy* in the late '20's and early '30's. After that they had degenerated into the quickie class. Making a gangster picture in 1946 had seemed to be an adventure in anachronism that would guarantee a flop. Besides, *The Killers* had cost only \$809,000 to produce, a fact which was a bid for outright disrespect in a day of elephantine budgets.

Hellinger's audience at a special showing was the press, and here he faced another obstacle—an ironic one. Mark was so well-liked—he had been called “the man nobody hates”—that the critics almost stayed away, for fear *The Killers* would turn out to be a horrendous cliché, and they didn't want to see him suffer. The projection room darkened and the projectionist let the film roll. Presently the air was gusty with sighed relief. The picture hit the critics with the impact of a falling safe. After a few weeks the crescendo of applause sounded like a La Scala claque in full “bravo.” Hedda Hopper said, “I take off my hat to Mark Hellinger and *The Killers*.” The New York Post acclaimed *The Killers* as the “perfectly produced film.” The Daily Mirror labeled it “a killer-diller, hot as a smoking gat.” Critic John Maynard, of the New York Journal-American, wrote that it was “the best picture of its kind ever made”; the New York Sun placed it “at the top of all thriller lists.” Juries of reviewers in New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and Pittsburgh voted it one of the ten best pictures of the year.

The Killers boosted Mark to a place in the Hollywood-producer hierarchy. Yet when Hollywood first lured him away from Broadway there were those who compared that separation to the parting of Siamese twins, and said he would never survive the operation.

There were understandable reasons for thinking that the place would prove unhealthy for him. The Broadway that Mark Hellinger knew was paved with quixotic loyalties. It was slushy with

sentimentalities that seemed saccharine to an outsider. You didn't "blow the whistle" on a pal. You slipped him a piece of change to tide him over when he was broke. If you could give a struggling hooper a plug on his first appearance at The Palace you gave it to him. You helped a friend "who's been away for a while" find a job when he "got out of the pokey."

On the other hand, Hollywood is the kind of place in which the executives are afraid to quit a gathering of co-workers long enough to answer the phone, for fear that when they come back a pal will have snaffled their job. Friends wondered how Mark would make out in such parlous surroundings. Nunnally Johnson, a former newspaperman, now a Hollywood writer-producer, put those fears into a letter of greeting he wrote to Mark:

Dear Mark: I meant to stop and welcome you to Hollywood at Chasen's the other night, but I became a little confused as to whether this was the thing to do or not.

It suddenly occurred to me that this would be useless, because I know in my heart that you will not be able to get anywhere out here. You are too tall. With writers the specifications in Hollywood are not stringent. They may be fat or thin, tall or short, or even medicine-dropper size. But with producers and other executives the rules are strict and inflexible. Unless you can stroll back and forth comfortably under a bridge table, you are doomed from the start. The reason for this is fairly clear. As Alva Johnston pointed out, the title "little Napoleon" in Hollywood is equivalent to the title "mister" in any other community. Obviously no studio is going to groom a man for a high position whom it has to refer to as "a veritable middle-sized Napoleon." This is the only place I ever heard of where the citizens practice stabbing themselves in the back in their spare time just by way of gymnasium workouts. I could go on like this at some length, but I am called to a story conference with some friends and I just have time to put on my groin cup.

I hope for the best for you.

NUNNALLY

One of the first things Mark had to become accustomed to in Bedlam on the Wilshire was the fact that people didn't habitually treat there. Hellinger had been called "by nature a freehanded

spender," a "check-grabber of the first water." Tipping was a fetish with Mark. He had been known to give away as much as a hundred dollars a day. When a doorman, hat-check girl, waiter, taxi jockey, bootblack or barber shook hands with Mark, his or her hand usually came away clasping a two-dollar bill. Such was his fame as a one-man eleemosynary fund that a porter seeing him board a Pullman offered the porter who serviced Hellinger's car thirty dollars to change places with him. Mark explained his prodigality by saying, "I was a waiter myself once, and one day a guy gave me two bucks instead of ten cents. I like to see other people get the glow I got then."

During Mark's newspaper salad days a Daily News co-worker saw him pick up the phone, listen and say, "I'll send the twenty bucks right around to you at Joe's place by a messenger." Mark kept on tapping away at his column. Suddenly he looked up in consternation to say, "I forgot to ask that guy his name."

A number of Mark's friends went to elaborate pains to beat him to the draw when it came to treating. Even the most elaborate of such plans were futile. Clem McCarthy, the sports announcer, whose scratchy, emery-wheel voice announces the Kentucky Derby and other race meetings, had tried to buy Mark a drink for twenty years. But the moment Mark entered an eating place he would case the joint for possible recipients of complimentary libations. Before he had been spotted by those who had sworn to buy him a drink instead of letting him buy them one, he would wigwag an order to the bartender, thus winning the contest.

Mark's favorite pastime used to be inducing unwary innocents to engage in an evening of imbibing with him. One such experience with Mark Hellinger had put many a man on the wagon permanently. Thus Mark was a kind of unofficial worker for the W.C.T.U., a leg-up the wearers of the white ribbon were unaware of.

This particular form of endurance contest was not sadism on Mark's part. It was much closer to a friendly test of stamina, such as Indian wrestling. During such contests Mark stuck to brandy. In covering night clubs, he had to drink in self-defense. Most pro-

hibition potables were made in bathtubs, and the only reasonably authentic drink was brandy. There wasn't enough demand for it to make imitating it profitable, so brandy became his tipple. By coincidence, because of some physiological freak in his make-up, brandy affected him very little—although other strong waters had the usual effect upon him—a fact which gave him an all-important edge in marathon elbow-bending.

Although Hollywood dry cleaners removed the taxi fumes of New York from his clothing years ago, Mark had spiritually never left it. Framed on the walls of his studio office was a ticket stub for the most expensive opening night in New York history, that of George White's Scandals on June 14, 1926. Tickets for that performance cost fifty-five dollars each. There was a photograph of Imogene Wilson as a glamorous Follies girl, flanked by a contrasting photo of her taken later, when she was on her uppers—"Those two pictures were the story of Broadway"—a photograph of Mark with Jimmy Walker; another of Helen ("He's just my Bill") Morgan, of the soft and tremulous mouth and the hauntingly oversized eyes; a solid-silver pass to the Follies, engraved with Ziegfeld's name.

Mark always kept his New York license plate (MH-1) on his car above his California plate. He paid a man in New York to clip the sports items and Broadway columns from the New York papers for him. His walk was the cocky strut of George M. Cohan—from whom he borrowed it. His haberdashery was as natty as the late Jimmy Walker's—whom he idolized. Yet despite his dapper-dandyism, he was no sartorial weather vane. Like Britain's Queen Mother, he knew what he liked and he wore it. Every day for the past twenty years he had appeared in a blue-black shirt and a white satin or white rayon tie. His hat was dark, wide of brim, and snapped down in front, as John Barrymore wore his. Time was when such hats were a reporter's badge of office.

Mark Hellinger was born in the Yorkville section of New York City on March 21, 1903. His father was a lawyer who specialized in real-estate law. His practice was a good one and he had hopes that his son would grow up in it. Mark worked in his father's office on

Saturday's, but found it dull. Even while in Townsend Harris Hall High School, he had been ambitious to write. Don Marquis and Franklin P. Adams, top columnists of the day, were his models.

He sold his first bit of writing when he was fifteen. It was a poem, and Saucy Stories bought it for \$1.50. He was also editor of the high-school paper's humor column. As many another columnist has done since, Mark decided to do something about rectifying injustices. Most of the other schools were given a holiday on a certain day. Mark thought Townsend Harris Hall ought to have a similar respite from study. He got the whole school out into the C.C.N.Y. stadium, where he made a speech, suggesting a strike if the school's principal failed to grant a holiday. Of a student body of 800, 300 backed Mark up.

But the principal was adamant, and on the second day of the strike the 300 strikers had dwindled to ninety. On the third day, when Mark went to the stadium to exhort his followers, he was the only one who showed up. He didn't bother to go back to Townsend Harris Hall High. He filled out the term with a study of the American theater in various burlesque houses, and took to carrying a copy of *Variety* around with him.

His father decided to give him one more chance. Hellinger, Senior, sent Mark to a cramming school in an effort to get him into a college that had a law course. Among those having concentrated doses of knowledge rammed down their throats was a son of an ex-president of Cuba. Mark had an idea. Together with the Cuban president's son, he would make an effort to crash Columbia University. "I'm pretty good at English," Mark told him, "and you ought to be able to smack the Spanish for a loop. You take the Spanish exam under my name and I'll take the English exam under yours." The president's son did his part manfully. He got a mark of ninety-nine in Spanish for Mark. Mark was proud of his knowledge of such prose matters as Don Marquis and F.P.A., and the little classics found between the covers of Saucy Stories, but his grade in English was a puny thirty-two. "I don't think the president's son ever got into college," Mark said. "I know I never did. I drifted

around for a while, then became a combination waiter and cashier in a Greenwich Village joint called The Redhead. I worked there during 1921 and the early part of 1922." He was paid a dollar a day plus one free meal if he didn't put away more than thirty-five cents' worth of food.

Prohibition was beginning to breed bizarre individuals and Mark had begun to meet the characters he was to write about all the rest of his life. Cops with special pockets built into their coats to hold pints of booze, handed out by the 'speak-easies they visited during their off hours, showed up to eat the steaks Mark's employer used to soften them up.

His next job was writing direct mail advertisements for Lane Bryant, a clothing house that stocks garments for outsize women. He was paid twenty dollars a week and had his name painted on his office door. For a year he thought up lures to bring blimplike ladies to Lane Bryant's for flattering habiliments. He was fired for having a painter add to his name on the door the title of a new business he planned to run in conjunction with the direct-mail-ad business.

MARK HELLINGER WRITING SERVICE COMPANY
ANYTHING FROM A BIBLE TO A BURLESQUE SHOW
WRITTEN WHILE YOU WAIT

With the evaporation of his Lane Bryant job, a friend of Mark's father, a man named Moss, suggested that Mark see the editor of Zit's Weekly, a theatrical publication. Zit's put him to work at sixteen dollars a week. Two of Zit's hirelings, Gordon Kahn and Mark, together with occasional visitors to the shop, put the paper together.

Mark reviewed plays and movies and wrote editorials by night. It was a tough, energy-eating job, but Mark thought it was heaven. His job gave him an entree backstage at the Follies.

A friend of Mark's, Steve Clow—a gentleman distinguished among other things for habitually drinking a mixture of ether and paraldehyde as a sedative—took Phil Payne, the editor of the Daily

News, to a ball given for a Follies star. Clow introduced Payne to Mark, and the Daily News editor asked Mark to identify some of those present. Mark knew only a few of those swirling to dreamy waltz tunes, but he rattled off high-sounding names anyhow. Payne was so impressed with Mark's knowledge of Broadway and the socialites drawn by its glitter that he wrote him a letter asking him to drop in and see about a job.

During the interview Payne asked Mark how much Zit's paid him. When Mark said, "Sixteen dollars," Payne, being hard of hearing, thought he said, "Sixty dollars." "We can't give you sixty," he said, "but we'll make it fifty."

The case of Steve Clow is proof of the fact that at times Mark's generosity had been carried to fantastic lengths. Clow owned and edited a sheet called Broadway Brevities. It was his custom to drop in on a man and show him a story set up in type: "Is it true that (the name of the man was inserted here) was visiting the flat of that little Follies girl last week, and is it true that he promised to give her a fur coat?" Such stories weren't complete fabrications; there was at least some basis of fact for them. There are those who still think Clow could have been an ace reporter if the feeling of power his unholy use of the news he ferreted out hadn't affected him as dope affects a hophead; giving him delusions of having all New York cowering at his feet.

After flashing his as-yet-unpublished item, Clow made his next step. "We're putting out an anniversary number," he'd say, "and I thought maybe you'd like me to put you down for a page ad." He sold a lot of page ads in this fashion before he was sent up to serve a term in the Federal penitentiary at Atlanta.

When Clow was released, he thought of Mark. Not only was Hellinger a notoriously soft touch but Clow was keenly aware of the service he had rendered Mark by introducing him to Payne. He hit Mark for a job, and Mark wrote to him: "Dear Steve: I can't get you a job on the Daily News, but I would like to help, so, if you wish, I'll send you ten dollars a week until you get on your feet."

Clow accepted Mark's aid with a certain disdain. "Such a sum

will at least keep me in cigarettes," he replied. For eleven years Mark sent him ten dollars weekly, plus additional touches for new overcoats and hats. "I saw him one day," Mark said. "He looked better dressed than I did. When I went to Hollywood I thought it was about time he was learning to take care of himself, so I gave my secretary a hundred dollars to dole out to him, and told her that would be all. Some months later I got a letter from him. In the envelope was my original letter promising him help—the one I'd written eleven years before. In big block letters he had penciled on it, "How about this, Mark?"

Marks last gesture toward squaring his account with Clow was to pay a New York undertaker for his funeral. Only three people showed up for it: Mark's secretary, the Federal attorney who'd sent Clow away to Atlanta, and a superannuated lady of easy virtue.

Within six months after Clow introduced Mark to Payne, Mark became the first reporter with a Broadway beat. The Monday paper was apt to be dull, and it was Payne's idea to liven it with pictures of girls. As a springboard for such pictures, Mark was told to pick the name of a man from the Social Register or Variety, reach him on the phone, and ask him, "Is it true you're divorcing your wife for (any actress' name)?" The man would say, "It's a lie," and the Monday paper would come out with a huge picture of the man's wife—or an actress—and the headlines: JONES DENIES RIFT WITH WIFE. "It was a scurvy trick," Mark said later, "but things don't seem so tough when you're that age, and the age you're living in is that tough."

In 1925 Mark took over a column formerly conducted by Bernadine Szold, called About Town. It had been a woman's column, but Mark changed it to a Broadway column. For his combined chores as columnist and reporter Mark was paid \$150 weekly, plus a \$100 expense account. "I was supposed to jot down the details of the costumes somebody like Mrs. Whitney wore to a certain night spot," Mark said. "Instead I did a story on Harry K. Thaw getting out of Kirkbride, and other items like that. I didn't do society at all. By the time my bosses got around to bawling me out about it, fan

letters about my stuff had begun to roll in, so they let me alone. It was then that I stumbled onto my short-story formula. Somebody would slip me a story about real people and I'd blow it up and fictionize it and put an ironic twist at the end. I knew people liked to be sad and have their hearts squeezed." Broadwayites reading his stories decided that Mark understood them as no one else did. Chorus girls about to fling themselves from windows left notes addressed to him on sills, so that he could tell his readers why they had done such a thing. Men keeping a date with the electric chair spent their last hours scrawling letters to Mark, describing their sensations while facing eternity.

Soon Mark was covering six or seven night clubs an evening. Giving prohibition the business was big business and the moguls of that big business were silent partners in, or openly the owners of, a number of night clubs. Being a night-club reporter, Mark naturally got to know them. In time he came to know more about gang wars and rackets and the Public Enemies who ran the country as if it were a Coney Island concession bought with guns and blood, than any other man alive—any man, that is, who wasn't a gangster himself.

In 1926 the Daily News ran a contest to select the most beautiful professional girl in the world. The prize was to be an automobile. Gladys Glad was working as a showgirl in a Ziegfeld show. She was sixteen and it was her first show. "She won the contest and I won her. She is still the most beautiful girl in the world," Mark said.

Gladys and Mark were married in July, 1929. Ziegfeld's wedding present to the bride was a \$1000 bill. In a Philadelphia interview last year, Mark was quoted as saying, "For the past seventeen years I have been marrying and divorcing the most beautiful girl in the world." The truth is that Mark had married Mrs. Hellinger only twice. The second time it took.

The Hellingers had two adopted children—Mark, Junior, and Gladys. Mark was sometimes appalled at their lack of the knowledge he felt any well-informed child should possess. With some

puzzlement, Mark, Junior, once inquired of his father, "Who is Peggy Hopkins Joyce, dad?" Facing this gap in Mark, Junior's store of essential information, Mark reacted as another father might to an offspring's report card liberally speckled with F's for Failure—his face showed shocked disbelief.

In 1930 Ziegfeld asked Mark to write the Follies for the year. It was the last Follies that Ziegfeld produced himself. In 1931, Mark, Lew Brown and Ray Henderson wrote Ziggy's swan-song show, *Hot Cha*. It was during this period that Mark invented an attention-getting device much used since—the phony feud. Jack Benny and Fred Allen, for example, used it on the air until it was worn threadbare. The first one Mark started was between Rudy Vallee and himself. "Vallee, at that time the Sinatra-Van Johnson of the day, got on my nerves one night," Mark said, "and I referred to him the following day as a 'pain in the neck.' Within a week I had received some five thousand letters equally divided in their opinions; the women raised hell, but the men all agreed with me. Accordingly, although Vallee and I were never bad friends, we kept the feud rolling for more than a year until it petered out." Mark replaced the Hellinger-Vallee brummagem warfare with a feud between Paul Gallico and himself. Mark and Paul Gallico, then a newspaperman and not yet the author of *The Snow Goose* and other short stories, slugged away at each other in print while their readers became so wrought up they engaged in fisticuffs on the street.

Joseph M. Patterson, owner of the *News*, finally tired of this synthetic vendetta, as well as other free-wheeling Hellinger columnar mannerisms. He passed the word along that Mark must develop a new approach—in short, that he must stop being Mark. Mark described the memo that broke this news to him as "the note that took me from Patterson to Hearst." The note, transmitted through the managing editor, said:

Dear Mark:

Mr. Patterson phoned last evening and instructed that in future your column must be made up of many items and confined to a

creative instead of an imaginative nature. Items are to be gleaned from what you observe in night clubs, on Broadway, and can include wisecracks. He doesn't want any more adventures of the Manicurist, Wladek Hravlek, or boy reporter to his grandmother. Neither are you to engage in controversy with Gallico of the sporting department, unless it is done in a very short item. In other words, we are going back to the old style of variety of items and many of them. November 20, 1929

HAUSE

After such a front-office spanking, when Hellinger began to get overtures from Hearst, he wasn't hard to lure away. He was offered \$500 a week together with 50 per cent of the profits from the syndication of his material to switch to King Features Syndicate and the Mirror.

Not content with the work he was already doing early in 1936, Mark went to Joe Connolly, head man of the Hearst's King Features and International News Service, and said, "Joe, I'm not as happy as I should be. I'd like to do a complete Sunday page in addition to my other work. I'll do a short story, write the captions for a comic strip, a complete joke column called Guys, Gals, Giggles and Groans, the best bits of the week culled from plays, movies, radio and sports, and a column of answers to the letters I get."

He reduced his daily columns for the Mirror to three a week, and gave the new enterprise all he had. Before long, a readership survey of the March of Events section of the Hearst newspapers in which the page appeared, as well as the several hundred other newspapers throughout America that printed it, showed that Mark's page was drawing 18,000,000 readers.

In his time, Mark wrote more than 6000 brief newspaper short-story vignettes.

"I was the weepiest sob sister in newspaper history," Mark said. He saw it this way: There was glamour in being a beautiful chorus girl, but there was heartbreak in it too. For every mink coat or magnum of champagne, there was a brush-off from the boy friend. For every stage success, there was a period in which beauty faded and sickness or privation ravaged the charms that had been the

town's toast. To Mark, any passing stranger with threadbare cuff might once have been a \$2000-a-week star. The title of a song, *There's a Broken Heart for Every Light on Broadway*, summed up his standard plot.

Mark had been turning out his Broadway stint for fourteen years when he broke his leg and landed in a hospital bed. He had a slot machine put in one corner of the hospital room, installed a bar and got a backgammon set. One afternoon the hospitalized Hellinger refused to play backgammon with a fellow columnist, Louis Sobol. According to Sobol, "I am going to do something serious," Mark said mysteriously. The following afternoon he again refused to play backgammon with Sobol. "I am continuing to do something serious," he insisted. The mysterious something he was doing was writing an outline for a screen play. The picture was *Broadway Bill*. Robert Riskin and Frank Capra took it from there. It was a smash hit.

In 1937 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer asked Mark to come to Hollywood to write a screen story based on the life of a gambler named Nick the Greek. Nick's story was an amazing one, but he had been playing hot and cold with the studios for years about selling it. When he was broke, he seemed receptive, but by the time the studio rushed the money around to him, he had raised enough ready scratch elsewhere to tide him over, and haughtily showed the studio's emissary the door. While Mark was waiting for Nick to run out of credit, the brothers Warner decided they wanted Hellinger as a writer. Six months later Mark was making A pictures all by himself. Twentieth Century-Fox was convinced that Hellinger had what Hollywood called "the pulse," meaning that he instinctively knew how to quicken the public's heartbeat, and in 1941 he moved to that studio, where he made *Rise and Shine*, and *Moon Tide*.

In 1942, after a return to the Warners' lot at a salary of around \$200,000 a year, Mark went back into reporter's harness for a spell. The thought that World War II was going on and he wasn't there to cover the biggest story of all was eating on him. Twice he tried to have himself accepted by the armed forces. Each time he was

turned down. Finally he arranged to be sent overseas as a Hearst war correspondent.

"Up to that time my experience with danger had been a by-product of prohibition," he said.

Some of Mark's experiences were grimly funny.

"Nowadays people think you're a dope addict when you tell them how it was," Mark said. "There was the story of the mobsters who kidnaped a race-track character. The race-track character's brother was a big shot in the garment business. The plan was to get the rich brother to come through for lots of scratch for releasing the loafer brother. The mobsters persuaded the snatched one to write a letter that ran: 'Dear Brother: They're going to kill me if you don't send fifty grand, quick.'

"The garment merchant took it calmly and sent back word: 'The no-good bum isn't worth a dime. He's always hanging around the tracks and blowing my coin. You keep him.' Taken aback, the snatchers sent another letter, plaintively asking, 'How about twenty-five grand?' As far as the garment merchant was concerned, it was no dice at any price. The mobsters' expenses were mounting, so they sold the race-track character to another mob for a cut-rate price—five thousand dollars."

Mark was once a passenger on a special train hired by a bootleg king to transport a party of friends to a Carnera fight in Miami. Mark shared the 'legger's compartment. But the 'legger couldn't seem to get to sleep. He had two bullets left in his chest from a previous exchange of gunfire, and his body shook with spasms of coughing. Unable to sleep, he talked to Mark. Mark asked him why he was such an easy touch for a lot of wrong guys, moochers, grifters, hangers-on and toadies.

"I spent nine years and ten months in the big house," the 'legger told him. "Someday I'll be going back there. Then one night somebody will have an extra piece of pie. Maybe one of these jerks I'm taking care of now will be the guy with that pie—he might give it to me. It'll taste good."

That Mark was still remembered by such folk as a "right guy"

who minded his own business and never crossed anybody was evident when a truck-weight armored car appeared in his garage when a hoodlum pal stopped one too many lead slugs. The armored job was bequeathed to him by the hood. It is equipped with bulletproof windows, and loopholes for guns. It lumbers two or three miles for each gallon of gas it devours.

At least one of Mark's associates thought his most outstanding characteristic was his consideration of the subordinates with whom he worked—the messengers, porters, janitors, secretaries. He called the male members of life's small-fry brigade "Pappy," its distaff members "Darling," "Doll" or "Honey." There was no condescension in such familiarity. With Mark, such names were terms of affection. "He knew how to get along with the stars too. No matter how huffed their feelings were when they went into his office, they came out of there feeling fine," the same associate said. "If he weren't in pictures, he'd be a great industrial-relations man."

During the 1936-1946 decade Mark made some memorable movies—*Brother Orchid*, *The Roaring Twenties*, *Torrid Zone*. Damon Runyon said that Mark's *Broadway Bill* was the best horse-race movie ever made. His *High Sierra* was a goose-pimpling film of violence and passion. His *They Drive by Night* was a slice of long-distance gypsy-trucking life transferred to celluloid.

He made no claim to being a discoverer of stars but he persuaded Jack Warner to put Humphrey Bogart in *High Sierra*, and the movie established Bogart as a romantic lead. He gave Ida Lupino one of her first opportunities as a dramatic star, and made Ann Sheridan's first starring vehicle.

"A producer in Hollywood is exactly as good as the material he has to work with, and no better," Mark said. "If I can get a Willie Wyler as my director, an Ingrid Bergman as my star, and a decent story, I could park my tootsies on my desk while other people do the work and I'll be hailed as a great producer. If I have to use Susie Blutz and Stanley Hutz and an inferior story, I'm a bum, regardless of what I've done in the past or what I may do in the future." Mark had reached a position in the industry, however, where

he should never again be compelled to use a Susie Blutz or a Stanley Hutz. In addition to his arrangement with Burt Lancaster and other potential stars whom he was constantly adding to his stock list, he had completed a deal with Humphrey Bogart whereby this top-ranking star would make one picture a year for Mark Hellinger Productions.

Leaving Warners, Hellinger made a deal with Universal-International to use their production and distribution facilities. He made *The Killers*, *Swell Guy*, *Brute Force*, and *The Naked City* under that arrangement.

Damon Runyon once wrote of Mark—after Mark had parked his feet under the table that holds Hollywood's fleshpots—"He is getting fat and prosperous, but they will never change the guy, never make him forget the little man on the street, the little man who is always the essence of any story." Runyon had a reputation for being an accurate reporter.

Mark is gone now but Leo McCarey remains.

It helped McCarey that he grew up with the movies. He knows that the important thing about pictures is that they move as well as talk. He served his apprenticeship in a day when they were silent.

When I went to see him, he had spent the past summer sitting in a pair of sun-faded swimming shorts behind the wall of his Santa Monica beach home, wondering how far is up. His last two movies, *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*, had pulled more movie-goers into theaters than any other two pictures ever made. Forty-one million people had seen *The Bells*. His \$1,113,035 income during the previous year had been the most staggering in the United States. It had topped that of the many-times Midas champion, Louis B. Mayer.

Because of those things, he was confronted with the possibility that down was the only direction left for him to go. To travel further up would be like Jean Felix Piccard trying to smash Captains Anderson and Stevens' world's altitude record in his expand-

ing balloon. Both feats were possible, but both were difficult of accomplishment.

A lesser man than Leo McCarey might have lowered his sights and gotten away with it. But McCarey's *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's* had grossed a fabulous twenty-five million and bid fair to hit thirty million before they were done, which gave him a lot to live up to. All of this added up to the fact that more than a barely stupendous movie was expected of a three-time Academy Award winner like McCarey. It meant, also, that he expected more than a merely good one from himself.

"After you knock off an Academy award, you get to thinking your next picture has got to be not only as good but better," he said. "Maybe you've got a hundred good stories kicking around on your desk, and maybe five of them are good enough, but you find yourself measuring them with an impossibly tough yardstick."

He labels the perfectionism that besets a man in his spot "Academy poisoning." The Oscar that Leo won in 1937 for directing *The Awful Truth* is still parked in his office. At times, when his particular brand of Academy poisoning is working on him with extra virulence, he yells to a secretary, "Throw that thing out of here, so I can think!"

McCarey's mind began to chew on making *Going My Way* several years ago, when he saw an outstretched hand extended in his direction. The hand belonged to the priest in charge of the Catholic church perched on the highlands atop the cliff behind Leo's beach home. The good father was making the rounds, with hand extended, seeking money for a worthy cause.

"He's always asking for donations," McCarey said. "He's a great one for reminding you, 'tis more blessed to give than to receive; and besides, he adds in a brogue as thick as a peat bog, 'it's deductible. What my church needs is a loud-speaker system, so God's word will come to you more clearly,' he told me. I didn't know it then, but I was meeting the Barry Fitzgerald character in *Going My Way*. I gave him a check and asked him, 'How long have you been up there, father?' 'Forty-five years,' he told me. 'I built the

church. But where have you been?' he asked me. 'I don't remember seeing you at Mass.' I changed the subject hastily and asked, 'How do you get along with your young priests?' 'They're nice young fellows who are figuring on how they can change things around when I die,' he said. He got the loud-speaker installed all right, but all it did was thicken his peat-bog brogue."

Once Leo's padre friend was arrested for making a left turn without making a hand signal. "You're supposed to set an example of law-abiding and decorum for your parish," the judge told him. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

He was unabashed. "Your honor, you're holding up a lot of people who ought to be getting to work," he said. "How much is the fine?"

"Ten dollars or ten days," the judge said. "But I'm going to make it a suspended sentence, for it's the first time in your life you haven't had your hand out."

When the idea for *Going My Way* began to ferment in McCarey's mind, he looked around for actors to play in it. He had met and grown fond of Bing Crosby during Bing's Rhythm Boys days. Even then he had tagged him in his mind as one who could act as well as sing.

"Someday," he told Bing, "I'm going to make a movie with you in it, and it won't be because of those vocal cords of yours."

Leo's promise became a running gag. Whenever McCarey saw him or talked to him on the phone, Bing asked, "Now?" and Leo said, "Not now." Finally, when Leo had made up his mind to do *Going My Way*, Bing said, "Now?" and Leo said, "Now."

The former Abbey Theatre actor, Barry Fitzgerald, proved a natural for the priest part. But, at the time, such a bit of casting was considered a McCarey brain storm. Fitzgerald had specialized in playing boozy old geezers; he was a Lutheran, and there were times during the shooting of the picture when McCarey despaired of ever teaching him to genuflect properly. Fitzgerald always managed to do it backward.

For some reason, a belief existed in movie circles that a religious

picture wouldn't even return preproduction costs. Each day while McCarey was writing *Going My Way*, people opened his office door to say, "I hear you're making a movie about a priest?" When Leo nodded, they whistled—the long low whistle let out slowly and forebodingly by a man who hears a friend is planning to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel. The whistlers departed, saying solemnly, "It's been nice knowing you, Leo. See you around town sometime."

One morning a studio executive opened Leo's door and asked, "How much have you spent so far?"

"Fifty-one thousand," McCarey told him.

"How about taking seventy-five thousand to call the whole thing off?" the executive begged.

Leo dug down into his own jeans and tossed \$51,000 into the maw of studio overhead costs. The gesture quieted the kibitzers for a while. But by the time the first day of shooting rolled around, even the carpenters and electricians were needling McCarey. "I hear Crosby's going to wear one of them long skirts buttoned all the way down to there," they said incredulously. "You sure you feel all right, chief?"

The rest is film history. When Paramount's top brass had a look at the film's rough cut, they bought back Leo's \$51,000 investment. Awards popped out of the picture like blackbirds from a Mother Goose pie. McCarey won the Academy award for 1944's best job of directing. Crosby, whom practically no one save McCarey had thought of as possessing any histrionic equipment except an enormously pleasing personality and a voice as smooth as hot butterscotch, won the Oscar for the year's best acting. Fitzgerald was given the nod for the best supporting role. McCarey won another nod as the writer of 1944's best original screen story. The picture itself was voted the year's best screen play, and the Academy threw in an extra Oscar for the film's hit song, *Swinging on a Star*, despite Judy Garland's full-throated thrushing of *Clang, Clang, Clang Went the Trolley* in *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

Such massive doses of Academy poisoning delayed Leo's next picture for more than a year. During that time McCarey picked

up innumerable stories, weighed them, and found them wanting. Not a Going My Way in the batch. He is famed in the false and gossip-column belt for taking a long time between pictures, but this time he threatened to set a new procrastination record. McCarey is Irish and impressionable, and it is possible that he was waiting for a sign. That sign came in the shape of a letter from an Army chaplain, flown in from an island in the Pacific. "Pardon my typewriter," the chaplain wrote, "but a tree just fell on it and it doesn't work too good. I was sitting here thinking of you and your predicament. I imagine everyone is telling you not to make another Going My Way. I'm not a story man, but I just want to throw you this thought: you haven't exhausted the story possibilities of religion in two hours and twenty minutes. Please send us one more." The one Leo sent him was *The Bells of St. Mary's*.

The Bells grew out of the things Leo remembers about an aunt—his father's sister—a nun who taught in a parochial school. One of his most vivid recollections is seeing her, flowing black skirts and all, with a football in her hands, kicking beautiful spirals to her school children.

In Ingrid Bergman, Leo found the perfect actress to portray his lead character, but to many who saw *The Bells of St. Mary's*, the Nativity play, acted by a group of small children, was the film's high point. Of all McCarey's sequences, it bears the strongest flavor of complete naturalness, a feeling Leo injects into his pictures so successfully that even those who understand the technique of movie-making find themselves wondering if he employs a hidden camera. This might have been because some of the small actors appearing in it didn't know the contrivance pointed in their direction was a camera, and those who did know didn't know when it was turning.

The son of one of Leo's oldest friends, six-year-old Bobby Dolan, who played Joseph, made up most of the dialogue. Leo said to him, "You're Joseph and this little girl is Mary, and you want to get a room in a hotel in Bethlehem. What would you say?"

"I'd go up to the hotel door and say, 'Knock, knock. I'm Joseph and this is Mary, and we want a room.'" Bobby replied. "The

hotel man would say, 'Have you got any money?' and I'd say, 'No,' and he'd tell me I'd better try someplace else."

"Go ahead and say it that way," Leo told him. "I'll fix it so the second hotel you try will let you in." At the end of the sequence Leo was searching for a Christmas carol for the tots to sing, when Bobby suggested, "Happy Birthday, dear Jesus, happy birthday to you." It was the song Leo used.

Although the child who played the baby Jesus bore a striking resemblance to Fiorello La Guardia, the small actors became so identified with their roles that they began to call each other by their cast names. When they went home, after a day's shooting, they said to each other politely, "Well, good-by, Joseph," and, "Good-by, Jesus."

But the Nativity play came within a whisker of not reaching the screen. Before the picture was released, a print of it found its way to the Hearst estate at San Simeon. The power of the press achieves its greatest potency in Hollywood, and the whims of those who switch that power on and off have been known to change even the stiffest studio backbones to suet. "When word came from San Simeon, that citadel of good taste," Leo said, "that the Nativity sequence was offensive, the head of the studio decided to leave it out." McCarey almost blew his top. But the local Catholic bishop saw it and thought it tender, natural, and eloquent of child faith. And Leo organized a campaign of letters and telegrams of protest among his friends, and focused those protests upon the ones who advocated slicing out the Nativity scene. In the end, Leo won and San Simeon lost.

When it became apparent that *Going My Way* was a solid click, Leo made a substantial donation to the near-by church as a thank offering. He made another after *The Bells* was released.

He has always given generously to charity, but now that he has been publicized as being the country's No. 1 money bag, he receives so many requests for aid even a Henry Ford or a Rockefeller would be hard pressed to handle them. The possibility that he might be thought stingy and lacking in kindness by those who write to

him asking for help distresses him. But he is forced to reply to such requests with a regretful refusal. "A request for a hundred bucks multiplied by seven or eight hundred adds up to more dough than the Internal Revenue Collector lets me keep, and I'm getting pleas like that by the carload," he said. "In the bracket I'm in, I have to make two thousand dollars to buy a new suit."

The tax setup being the way it is, the \$1,113,035 on which Leo paid income tax for 1945 didn't mean an outsized fortune in the bank for him. After taxes, he netted only a few cents on the dollar. Moreover, he is still in hock for many thousands of dollars. This dates from the time he entered into a contract with Howard Hughes some years ago. It was Hughes' notion that McCarey would be a good man to direct a movie to be called *Queer People*—a film designed to take Hollywood apart in small, bleeding bits. Leo sweated on the script with Author Ben Hecht for months before Hughes decided to call the whole thing off and let the movie people go back to sleeping soundly nights.

Hughes had paid Leo \$58,000, but, undaunted, he signed him to a new contract. This agreement stipulated that Leo's salary would begin only when actual production started, and he remained idle so long that he had to borrow money from a bank to live. When RKO finally convinced Hughes of the wisdom of selling McCarey's contract to them, his lengthy layoff had cost him \$109,000. The bank assessed a portion of the profits accruing from any future pictures Leo makes to go toward repayment of the loan. The result is that Leo doesn't start to collect until the bank first has its cut.

Such an impasse is typical of McCarey's career. His entire life has been that of a man being taken for a forty-eight-year ride on Fate's dizziest roller coaster. So rapidly has Lady Luck switched her moods that it has been hard for him to keep up with her shifting smiles and frowns. In his time he has made and lost several fortunes. The small son of one of his best friends had listened to his parents discussing McCarey's financial tumbling act so many times that when he heard them talking about Leo's vast current

earnings, he was puzzled. "Did Uncle Leo lose that much or make it?" he asked.

One of the reasons for McCarey's fiscal ups and downs is that he is a very casual man with a buck. So soft a touch is he that one or two of the film city's topnotch moochers—men who take a quiet pride in their work—refuse to put the bite on him, for the same reason high-minded sportsmen refuse to shoot a sitting bird.

His way of living involves less swank than that indulged in by hundreds of movie men who earn only a fraction of the amount he makes. The monthly rental on the beach home in which the McCareys lived until recently was \$250—a sum Hollywoodians think of as the kind of small change usually spent in leasing a walk-up apartment. The McCareys have one car and one servant, a maid. Leo starts his day with a dip in the pool built into the yard of his beach home, and eats a truck driver's breakfast. When making a picture he's on his way to the studio by 6:45 A.M. When he's not working, he sits in the sun, thinking and reading.

His indifference where money is concerned is akin to that with which he regards his worldly possessions. Not long ago, while on his way home, he picked up two sailor hitchhikers. Arriving at his destination, he said, "This is as far as I go. Where are you boys bound?" His passengers were trying to get back to the Port Huemene naval base fifty miles away. "You keep the car until you get there," Leo told them. When they drove his car back safely a day or two later, Leo wasn't surprised. It hadn't occurred to him that handing an auto over to two men he'd never seen before, and whose names he didn't know was anything out of the ordinary.

Another explanation for his long succession of fractured pocket-books has been the fact that his bones have proved even more brittle than his wallets. Taking a long time between takes is not the only thing that slows down his film output. He is the film industry's leading physical Humpty Dumpty. Each time he arrived in the chips some part of his skeleton shattered and shelved him for a long count, sometimes for months. Altogether, hospitalization

and convalescences have subtracted more than six years from his productive life.

When he was a youngster he tried his hand at prize fighting, but, though he occasionally had his ears batted back, he managed to keep his nose still descending in a straight line toward his upper lip, a bit of good luck that encourages some of his friends to say he looks like Cary Grant. This is not strictly true, although through some trick of the camera he does resemble Grant in his photographs.

Leo McCarey was born in Los Angeles on October 3, 1898. His father was "Uncle" Tom McCarey, Southern California's equivalent of Tex Rickard. Leo was educated at Los Angeles High School and at the University of Southern California, where he majored in law and married an excitingly pretty Los Angeles girl named Stella Martin. He tried copper mining as a day laborer and staged a catch as catch can wrestling match with a law practice.

He lost the bout and took on an easier (for him) opponent: the movies. A pal, Dave Butler, introduced him to Director Tod Browning, and Leo found himself with a new kind of job.

He said, "It was my duty to remember whether or not the hero had a cigarette hanging from his lip in the scene that preceded the one we were shooting, so that when the whole thing was glued together, a butt wouldn't fly out of his lips, like a hummingbird, right in the middle of a sequence. Then my legal training began to pay dividends. When they discovered I could use big words like 'whereas,' I zoomed upward. In one picture I was third assistant director, second assistant director, first assistant director and finally director. But it was too good to last. When it was over, they set me back on the two-yard line as an assistant director and kept me there for five years."

While working with Director Tod Browning, McCarey played handball at an athletic club. Producer Hal Roach played there too. "You're a great guy for laughs," Roach told him. "How about coming over to work for me?" Roach made McCarey vice-president.

Roach was a powerful man, with a chest furred like a grizzly

pelt, and one day Leo found himself sitting in the athletic-club steam room, studying his employer thoughtfully. The more he studied, the more thoughtful he grew. Finally he reached a decision. Rising to his feet, he announced, "I quit. A guy hasn't a chance to get to the top around here with a boss as healthy as you." It wasn't a gag. He meant it.

When he stalked off the Roach lot, he stalked into chaos. The cinema had suddenly become articulate. Sound had arrived, dialogue had become the rage, and pantomime was forgotten. Stage directors poured from every train, while silent directors punched new holes in their tightened belts and wondered what had hit them.

Another Irish-American broke Leo's personal log jam. Joseph P. Kennedy, afterward Ambassador to Great Britain, was sent West by RKO-Pathe's New York bankers to fuse the studio's wobbly financial backbone. Kennedy put McCarey to work directing Eddie Quillan in a film called *The Sophomore*, the picture that kited Quillan into stardom and made Leo a star in the directoral field.

Leo was the Beau Brummel of directors. He had puttees, a checked cap worn backward, and four megaphones, all different sizes—the smallest for deathbed scenes, the largest for directing mob fights.

His second picture for Kennedy—*Red Hot Rhythm*—ran into difficulties that taxed even the ingenuity of a graduate of the Roach shoot-'em-off-the-cuff school. A strike was on and no studio was allowed to use an actor unless he was under contract. RKO-Pathe had been in the habit of borrowing actors from neighboring studios, like a housewife dropping in for cups of sugar, and the edict left McCarey well-nigh actorless. He made *Red Hot Rhythm* with the two song writers who had been hammering out tunes for the picture, elevated to the leading roles. One of those so boosted was Walter O'Keefe, who afterward became a stage comedian and a radio master of ceremonies. The other song-writer actor was Bobby Dolan, now at Paramount as a musical director. It was Dolan who scored *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*.

When asked how it did with the picture McCarey says, "All I know is that, after that, Kennedy gave up pictures."

With the departure of Kennedy, Leo found himself working for Paramount, shooting a picture called *The Milky Way*, starring Harold Lloyd. When it was over, McCarey felt dizzy. A doctor poked a thermometer into his mouth and it registered 105 degrees. Someone had had the bright idea that it would be a good publicity angle if everybody connected with *The Milky Way* drank quantities of milk while shooting it. Leo wound up with a galloping case of undulant fever.

Once out of the hospital, he made up his mind to reorganize his way of working. Being on a studio pay roll to the tune of heavy sugar made him feel like a man in a gilded cage. When the studio handed him a story turkey to turn into a tasty dish, he had to season it and serve it up, whether it was a tough, old, cold-storage bird or not. So he arranged to have his Paramount contract abrogated, and started afresh with a deal that involved making only those pictures in which he saw definite possibilities.

Such freedom was heady wine. His first film under the new arrangement was *Make Way for Tomorrow*. It is still the picture of which he is proudest. He decided to use no stars in it at all—only actors. The cast of *Make Way* was heavy with sheer acting talent; among others, Tommy Mitchell, Beulah Bondi, Fay Bainter and Victor Moore. But the picture's theme cut too close to the public's bone—and not its funny bone, either—to make money. As Leo's daughter, Mary, summed it up, its theme was simply this: "Why are children so mean to their parents?"

Leo didn't think of it as a bitter movie. Bitterness is no part of his stock in trade. Laughter is the bull's-eye he's gunning for, although his target is usually surrounded by concentric circles of pathos. "Let other people take care of sordidness and ugliness," he said. "I string along with Disney. I think the biggest message of all is *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf*. The way I look at it, it's larceny to remind people how lousy things are and call it

entertainment. A lot can be done using wit to get a point over without giving offense."

When the returns were in for *Make Way for Tomorrow*, and it was obvious that the public had voted thumbs down, Leo was bewildered and angry. Using a couple of stars Columbia had hanging around doing nothing, he whipped up a farce comedy in little over a month. "It was one of those My-God, my-husband jobs," Leo said. "I was still pretty mad when I made it. I was so mad I was like a guy slugging, with tears running down his face."

Once it was in the can, Leo took his wife abroad to forget the box-office chill that had greeted his pet. In Budapest he got a cablegram from California. It said: COME HOME AND PICK UP YOUR OSCAR. "I thought I'd won it for *Make Way*," Leo said. "I told myself it couldn't be for that is-there-a-man-hiding-under-your-bed farce I'd made." He grins wryly when he says this: "But it was."

An onlooker, beholding the rewards thrust upon him, might think McCarey's cup of happiness full to overflowing. Such is not the case. In his heart he is a tunesmith first—albeit a frustrated one—and a maker of movies afterward. In his time he has tinkered together more than 1000 ditties, but the closest he has come to nudging Berlin and Gershwin over in their niches was with a little number called *Why Do You Sit on Your Patio?* sung by the Duncan Sisters in a musical show. Nature had supplied the Sisters Duncan with very cute patios indeed, but the song is remembered by almost no one now save Leo.

The McCarey stamp on a picture has been described as being "somewhere between the Capra and the Lubitsch touch." Not only does he do what comes naturally, he does what other people don't think of doing. One of the most memorable moments in movie history occurred when Leo had Charles Laughton, the English actor, recite Lincoln's Gettysburg address in *Ruggles of Red Gap*. Orators had been standing spraddle-legged on Fourth-of-July platforms for generations bellowing Lincoln's words, but Laughton's rendition of them made every previous attempt sound windy and meaningless. When Laughton's precise English accent began,

"Fourscore and seven years——" thousands of Americans wept unashamedly.

Studio executives live in hope that exposing directing talent to McCarey's genius will prove contagious. While Leo was filming *Going My Way*, Paramount hired a director who had had a minor success with a Little Theater group. The front office told the new man to sit on Leo's set for two or three days and study his technique. When McCarey became aware of the presence of a stranger staring at him, owl-eyed, watching his every move, he asked who the interloper was. "We're hoping to groom him to be a director like you," Leo was told. The next day, when the head of the studio, Buddy De Sylva, reached his office, there was a man there eying him with steady concentration.

"Who are you?" De Sylva asked.

"Mr. McCarey hired me to study you, so I can learn to be an executive," the visitor said. "He says it'll only take me part of one day."

Leo has his own way of handling screen love. He believes in having boy-be-honest-about-his-love-for-girl instead of shooting those teasers known as boy-gets-girl. There is no toeing in, no tittering about the kind of love he films. His lovers are, quite frankly, nuts about each other. The complications in the path of their love come from a recalcitrant fate rather than from the use of a triangle motif.

Some of the incidents McCarey puts into pictures could be unbearably corny, were it not for the fact that his sincerity saves them from that. When he has a church burn after forty years of prayer and labor went into building it, he's leveling with his public. He's leveling when Barry Fitzgerald's old mother comes over from Ireland to see her son once more before she dies. Such things come from inside McCarey. They aren't skimmed from the top of his mind. He's a great one for having wastrels repent and God step in to save people from the powers of evil.

There is nothing tongue in cheek about his sentiment, either in the movies he makes or in his private life—Although his family is a small one—it consists of his wife and a nineteen-year-old

daughter, Mary—Leo is a strong family man. Two words of Mary's cut short a vacation abroad that Leo took with his wife, shortly before the war. The McCareys had put through a transatlantic telephone call to their daughter. "We think we'll stay over here for Christmas," Leo said.

There was a moment of expensive silence. Then Leo, in Paris, heard Mary, in California, say in a small voice, "No tree?" The McCareys rushed right down to the American Express and bought tickets home on the next boat.

McCarey doesn't count on words to put a scene over, and he uses as few of them in a movie as he can. "Do it visually," is his motto. When Leo's father, "Uncle" Tom McCarey, died, he left Leo an invaluable legacy. "What I know about pictures you could pack into a four-ounce glove and still have room left for the usual amount of padding," he said. "But I know one thing; people don't like to be bored." This advice has run his son's film costs into astronomical figures, for Leo has thrown away hundreds of thousands of feet of footage he thought contained even a faint flavor of dullness. "You'd be surprised how much you don't need to say when you think that way," he once said.

After months of sitting on the Santa Monica beach and trying to throw off the toxic effects of Academy poisoning, Leo has made up his mind what his next picture will be. "If I didn't exhaust religion in two hours and twenty minutes, I didn't exhaust it in four hours and forty minutes. My next job will be Adam and Eve. It'll start out like Genesis. The stars will flash on. The earth and sea and firmament will take form. Then, after impressive footage of these things, I'll open up with man—Adam."

As McCarey sees it, Adam thought pretty much the same way any average man of today thinks. "He had shimmering waterfalls, gorgeous foliage and blooms all around him. Grapes and pomegranates dropped into his mouth. And he had a beautiful woman. What more could he want? But being a man, he was always groping vaguely for something. One day he decided that what he wanted was to build a road.

“‘Where to?’ Eve asks. ‘We don’t know anybody.’

“‘Dammit all, Eve,’ he says, ‘you don’t understand. A man’s got to do something with his time. Besides, a road might come in handy.’

“When they get thrown out of Eden, Adam figures he can now poke a hole in the ground with a stick and drop in a seed and cultivate it and watch it grow. Doing that gives him a feeling of accomplishment, instead of just sitting around letting God take care of him. In a way, it’s a new kind of Eden for him, an Eden that depends for its bliss on how much brains and ingenuity and hard work he puts in it.”

McCarey is seeking an actor and actress who’ll typify all mankind and all womankind. He thinks Ingrid Bergman will fill the all-womankind bill. The all-mankind problem is tougher. He had a player in mind for Adam, but the actor selected was so thin that he felt he’d look ridiculous in a pair of fur shorts.

“I’ll write in a scene,” Leo told him, “in which you tell Eve, ‘Oh, so I need fattening up, do I? Well, let me tell you, my good woman, I looked mighty healthy until I had you. I’ve been run-down and peaked ever since they took that rib away from me.’” But the actor still said, “No.”

The idea of more than two hours of screen entertainment, in which only two characters appear—not even relieved by Cesar Romero as the snake—is one that would ordinarily lead a movie maker’s friends to urge him to see a psychiatrist. The chances are that no one will suggest such a visit to Leo. The doubting Thomases who peered into his office when he was writing *Going My Way* are now believers. “If anybody can pull it off, Leo can,” they say. “That guy makes going his way look easy.”

4. *"We Were Standing on the Brink of an Abscess"*

A lot of Hollywood stories come close to writing themselves. The place is loaded with off-beat personages (off-beat either from birth or because they have deliberately made themselves that way) who can't help being good copy even if they'd rather not. Nor does it follow that such folks have nothing but their off-beatedness on the ball. To help them come up with thousand dollar bills nestled behind their Puckish ears.

It's a pity no one bothered to tell the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation about Hollywood's director-producer, Mike Curtiz, before they spent a sizeable amount of money developing their word scrambler. A word scrambler is a device that takes conversation, tosses it like a salad, and delivers it overseas battered into an unrecognizable condition. Such buffeting insures conversational privacy, for no one listening in while the words are en route can make head or tail of them until they reach their destination and are sorted out by another machine.

If it could have hired Curtiz, I. T. & T. would have had working for them, ready-made, the world's leading word scrambler. In a community that has lifted assault and battery on the spoken word to a fine art, Mike is the outstanding practitioner of such mayhem. He had to be a top word wrestler to outgrapple competitors like Sam Goldwyn ("Include me out"); the King brothers ("We are standing on the brink of an abscess"); and Gregory Ratoff, Hollywood's juiciest and most unintelligible splutterer.

When Mike wants to see his dentist, he telephones him to ask, "Are you vacant?" If he is trying to scatter extras about a scene in small groups, he tells them to "separate together in a bunch." Those to whom such orders are issued understand them, because Curtizisms, however startling, are flavored with a pungency that often makes their meaning clearer than more orthodox phrasing would do. Cases in point are Mike's stage direction to a young starlet: "It is morning and a haystack and lots of sunlight . . . turn over on your stomach and look sex" and, to another actress, "Sit a little more female." Once, when he wanted Raymond Massey to change his position in a window so the light would shine on him, his instructions were to "hit the sun with your face."

"If," he said to an ambitious prop man, "you want to become a director, you should sit on top from the camera and pant like a tiger."

There are two schools of thought about Mike's English mangling. So superlatively cockeyed are some of the sentences that jet from his lips that some of Hollywood's realists think he utters them that way deliberately, to embellish a growing Curtiz legend. Others, not so suspicious, point out that his most notable language fractures occur while he is excited and is talking so fast he has no time to think up new Curtizisms.

Producer Hal Wallis, who once worked with him, thinks the reason behind Mike's curved-verb pitching is a simple one. "His mind works faster than his tongue," Wallis said. "There're more words milling around in his brain than he can get out in the usual way, so they fall over each other in exit."

One tip-off that Mike's double-talk is pure happenstance rather than intentional is his pride in his mastery of English. "I spik it now so well," he said, "that when I see somebody from Budapest I'm talking in broken Hungarian." There are people in Hollywood who have compiled whole volumes of Curtizisms, but no one has yet undertaken to record his broken Hungarian; possibly because the mind reels at the prospect.

The truth is that a Curtizism is not always the same kind of

verbal what's-it as a Goldwynism. Nor is it always a malapropism. The grammatical misdemeanors in a Curtizism are few. It is simply a new idiomatic salient; a redeployment of the language. In twenty years of picture making, Curtiz has displayed a sensitive awareness of his adopted country. Many of his movies have been as American as *E Pluribus Unum* or hominy grits. Linguistically, however, he not only resists absorption but speaks a picturesque tongue of his own.

Hollywood wags say that Mike has invented a completely new language—Curtiz. Bette Davis and Errol Flynn claim to speak Curtiz fluently. When Vincent Price reported at Warner Brothers to play Sir Walter Raleigh in *Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*, he saw signs "Curtiz spoken here." Entering into the spirit of the thing, Price asked for a copy of Curtiz in *Ten Easy Lessons*. As the picture neared completion, he found it a simple matter to carry on a conversation in Curtiz. He even found himself ordering meals in Curtiz. The catch was that sometimes he didn't get what he thought he ordered.

For some reason, the appearance of a horse on Mike's horizon seems to spur his phrase bending on to new triumphs. During the making of *Santa Fe Trail*, the script called for a horse to dash past the camera foaming at the mouth. On the first attempt the horse not only went the wrong way but seemed fresh and rested. Obviously he needed another application of fake foam. "Sweat that horse and aim him the other way," Mike commanded.

For another scene in which a horse was supposed to return from battle minus its rider, Mike cried, "Bring me an empty horse!" Reprimanding a group of sluggard equestrians, he remarked, "Make it three times more gallop. Go like hell."

Another shot required the services of a baying dog. But to Curtiz, the dog was a histrionic flop. "The dog," Mike said unhappily, "should bark from left to right."

One dream envisioned by the less inhibited scientific magazines has been a television device making it possible for both parties to a telephone conversation to see each other. This invention can't come

too soon for Mike. Sometimes, when trying to describe an object or a bit of action over the phone, he motions with his hands and says, "I want it like this." When such manual explanations fail, he gives up in disgust and remarks, "Maybe I'd better come over and see you."

Hollywood's literati think that when it comes to slashing his way through hampering language conventions and getting at the heart of the meaning he is trying to convey, Mike out-Joyces James Joyce. "You speak," he told an actress with a California-acquired Oxford accent, "with too much afternoon tea." When he says, "I want it weary looking," he means "weird." When he needs owls to symbolize spookiness or nighttime, he asks for "those things that hoot and run around through the air."

Occasionally, however, even to admirers of Mike's offbeat diction, he is almost incomprehensible. His simile, "Busy as a bee-dive," is meaningful only by association.

"I want," he said during a visit to Canada, "to see quintaloupes."

"Where is that?" asked his friends.

"Not a where—a what," replied Mike testily.

"All right, what what?"

"Quintaloupes."

His friends said, "I don't get you, Mike."

"You know, those five twins," he explained patiently.

No matter how hilarious Mike's tussle with thought-conveying may be, it is a mistake to think of him merely as a creator of unintentional bons mots. That is only one facet of his many-sided talent. Those who pass along his latest howler hasten to add, "Don't get me wrong, bud. I've got a lot of respect for him. He ought to be known for the movies he's made instead of his 'bring-me-an-empty-horse' stuff." In all fairness, millions of movie-goers do know and admire his pictures who never heard of Curtiz, the English breaker.

Since 1931 he has directed seventy-four films—an amount of work so staggering that it has been equaled by only a handful of men in the film industry. Among the seventy-four were such memorable ones as Al Jolson's *Mammy*, *Black Fury*, *Robin Hood* (codirector),

Angels With Dirty Faces, The Sea Wolf, Dive Bomber, Yankee Doodle Dandy, Casablanca, This is the Army, Passage to Marseille, and Mildred Pierce, the film that won a 1945 Oscar for Joan Crawford.

Mike achieves his results through hard-driving perfectionism and an exhaustive—and, to those he works with, exhausting—knowledge of every detail that goes into the making of a film. He knows what a motion-picture camera can be made to do better than most movie cameramen. He understands cutting better than any cutter he could employ. He never asks his crew of electricians to produce a lighting effect he couldn't produce himself. He is familiar with the art and costuming of any period he is called upon to portray on the screen.

Curtiz is a master of "cutting in the camera." One of his assistants said, "When he made Watch on the Rhine, that was it. When the camera stopped rolling, the picture was done. There was nothing to cut out."

Hollywood's wise men know that the quality of a film, even the difference between whether it qualifies as an Academy Award nominee or not, often depends on some cutter whose name the public never hears. Mike's own theory about cutting is, "A right director cuts on the set, instead of in cutting room. His individuality should be on the film, not the individuality of a cutter. I don't see black and white words on script when I read it—I see action on screen. When I come on set I transpose script to screen. I know definitely what I want. Is not fishing. It becomes instinctive through years and years of experience."

That part of his perfectionism that insists on the best his actors can give has won him a reputation as Hollywood's most relentless cracker of a black-snake whip. Mike is aware of this reputation. "Actors respect me," he said, "but I think they don't like me." In 1932 John Barrymore was working in Mad Genius for Mike. One night he was out at Venice, which is like New York's Coney Island. He was watching the marathon dancers when Charles Winninger said to him, "Those poor people. How can they stand it?" "That

is nothing,” Barrymore told him. “Have you ever worked for Michael Curtiz?”

“When I see a lazy man or a don’t-care girl, it makes me tough,” Mike said. “I am very critical of actors, but if I find a real actor, I am first to appreciate it. I am very contemptuous to unreal things. I try to express myself real. It is very difficult to get down-to-earth result with actors who don’t act at all. I am not too much popularity, but I think Miss Bergman is my friend, and Joan Crawford and Irene Dunne and Claude Rains and Spencer Tracy my friends. Dunne and Bergman, they have patience like angels. Rosalie Russell is a wonderful co-operation girl too. Humphrey Bogart never study, but he is always great. These don’t resent my being ambitious to having good acting in my pictures. Some others also like to working with me. I tell Audrey Totter, you will have to dye your hair for a picture and she say, ‘For you I would shave it off.’

“Acting is a half art,” he thinks. “It is fifty per cent a beeg bag of tricks. The other fifty per cent should be talent and ability, although it seldom is.”

Mike drives himself too. Years ago, before the unions changed the number of hours movie people are allowed to work consecutively, it was possible to shoot pictures by night as well as by day. That was duck soup for Mike. He used to go for several days without sleep to finish a picture. He pays his assistant directors more than the regular wage scale because he works them so hard.

He never eats lunch; he thinks it a waste of time. In his own opinion, he is becoming more tolerant of those who he feels aren’t knocking themselves out every minute to help him make every picture he makes the best one ever made. “In the beginning,” he said, “I spik often very rude. Now I’m working a little more kid gloves.”

His prop man, Limey, who has been with him seventeen years, says of him, “Suppose he makes a scene today. Two weeks later, when he is making a connecting scene, he’ll remember the exact lighting he used fourteen days before, what lens he used and what exposure, where the actors were and where the camera was.”

Mike hasn't had a real vacation in so many years that he can't remember when he took his last one. He has started on several. The first day he hikes or rides over the hills. The second day he begins to wonder what is happening at the studio. The third day he goes back to find out. After that his vacation is forgotten. But although he has never had a real vacation, he has managed to crowd a certain amount of violent relaxation into his life. He was a one-goal polo player in the days when Darryl Zanuck, Hal Roach and Walt Disney played the game. Lately he hasn't played much. A broken ankle acquired in a polo match has interfered. According to those who saw him sweep down a field, the wild-eyed impetuosity of his riding frightened the other players away. He carried his polo mallet like a lance and pulled off shots that were never seen before or since in polo. When Zanuck, Roach and Disney weren't around, he practiced alone, shouting encouragement to himself as he rode.

He is six feet tall, as solid as a rock, hawk-eyed and hawk-nosed. He takes sun baths winter and summer. "Even," says his wife, "when other people are swathed in furs." He also believes in cold showers, and spends many minutes in one every morning. Using no mirror, he sits on a wooden stool placed on the shower floor and shaves. He even naps under the flowing water. Hal Wallis once found him snoozing amid the splashing spray, and thought he was dead.

When he finishes at the studio at night, he goes home, takes off his coat and reads scripts. "I have three readers, and all day I read myself," he said. "Between a thousand story I find one I can use. Pipples say to me, 'Why you work so hard for these millionaires who own the pictures?' Is easy to answer. I work because I don't want to be kicked out. The only way you can stay on top is keep on smiling and show your teeth. You feeling lousy and they ask you how you feel. You say, 'O.K. fine, just fine. Everything is wonderful.'"

Curtiz is up at six and at the studio sometimes as early as seven-thirty, never later than eight. The average director arrives at eight-forty-five. Because Mike is often the first one to reach the Warners'

lot, the studio manager has given him his own key with which to let himself in. He lives, dreams and talks movies. He even talks about movies in his sleep. According to his wife, he now talks about them in his sleep in Curtiz English. When they were first married, he talked about them in Hungarian.

Mike was born in Budapest. The proper pronunciation of his name is not "Curteez"—although most people call him that—but "Curtez." He describes his boyhood by saying, "My father was a carpenter, very poor. Many times we are hungry. When I was a kid ten years old in Vienna, my mother is sick. I overhear the troubles my father is having in paying for her operation. I tell my brother then, all my life I will work to keep from being that way, sleeping with four other kids in one room."

He picked up a few kronen as an opera super and, when he was seventeen, went on the road with a circus. "I was good athlete in school," he said. "Runner, jumper like that; so I work on bars and rings." In addition, he also did pantomiming and juggling. He can still toss a lighted match into the air and catch it by the unlighted end without extinguishing the flame. It is a neat trick.

When he was eighteen he finished high school, and at twenty-two entered the Royal Academy of Theater and Art in Budapest. "In Austria-Hungary you had to graduate from such a school to get an actor's contract," he said. "Here, in this country, some schools like that are a racket; in Europe they were under government control. I study three languages, I even study anatomy and make-up. There are examinations every three months. It is tough. There are a hundred eighty-two in the class. Sixteen get a diploma.

"So I became an actor, played leading roles in classical and modern dramas, then a stage director. In summertime I organize a group going through the country putting on little shows. Then I break into motion picture. I am interested in motion picture before I ever see a studio. One producer had sign a cameraman, but no director. A director was too expensive. The cameraman yelled for instructions what to do. I said, 'I know stage direction. I help you.' I never went back on the stage. In Copenhagen I became an assistant direc-

tor, but first I want to learn the camera. So I became a laboratory worker and learned all the tricks a camera can do." Mauritz Stiller, Greta Garbo's Swedish director, taught him.

He directed motion pictures for Sascha Productions in Hungary and for UFA in Germany and built Hungary's first motion-picture studio. When World War I came, he enlisted in the 24th Howitzer Regiment, became a captain and was wounded twice. After his second wound the Austro-Hungarian Government assigned him to the Italian front, then to Constantinople to film war news.

Next he went to France to work for the Gaumont studio. "I see two men watching me," he said. "They watch for three days. I am temperamental director, and I say to them, 'The director is nervous. Will you walk out, please, and close the stage door quickly?' One of the two men whisper something to my assistant, and my assistant tells me Mr. Warner, of America, is watching me and will give me a job."

It proves something about Hollywood—probably that the only thing predictable about it is its unpredictability—that a man who was born in Budapest and who spent his formative years against a foreign background, should be given the assignment of making such 100 per cent American pictures as *Mammy*, *Under a Texas Moon*, *Cabin in the Cotton*, *20,000 Years in Sing Sing*, *Dodge City*, *Santa Fe Trail*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* and *Life With Father*.

Mike was imported from Paris in 1927 to make a mammoth production tentatively called *Noah's Ark*. He had won fame in Europe as a kind of Hungarian Cecil B. DeMille, a director with the knack of confecting the kind of films that involved the dividing of the Red Sea for the fleeing Israelites and that sea's subsequent clamping down on the pursuing Egyptians. Spectacle directors, like Curtiz and DeMille, were the first to give the word "colossal" its movie meaning.

Mike had been told that the American people were hospitable, and that they would be just that in his case. When he docked at a New York pier, sirens were blowing, bunting and flags were everywhere. The streets were thronged with celebrating crowds. Forewarned as

he was about Yankee warmheartedness, he was surprised at the reception the people of the United States were giving him. On the other hand, he thought, the welcome was a little impersonal. He found out later that his arrival had coincided with the Fourth of July.

“When I reach Hollywood, I come out to the studio on the street-car,” he said. “Under my arm was the story outline of Noah’s Ark. I had written it coming across country on the train. The man I am to report to is on the massage table in his office, having his stomach bounced. I ask him when do I start Noah’s Ark, and he said, ‘We have decide not to do that. Leave your script on the massage table. You will make Third Degree.’ So, first I am to make a criminal picture. European criminology is entirely different from Yankee one; I didn’t know what to do, but I know my entire career depends on it. First I have a translation made of the script so I can read it. Next somebody tells me to see the sheriff of Los Angeles County. I go to him and said, ‘I need your advice. I just come to America and they give me the Third Degree. I have no idea how to do it.’ He ask me, ‘How much time you got?’ I tell him three weeks. So for ten days I live with him in jail. I am up every morning at four o’clock studying fingerprint, eating with the detectives, going to morning line-up. When I finish, I know more about jail system and American criminals than the technical director they pay big dough to tell me about such thing.”

During his first picture for Warners, Mike was fired three times. In Europe, in movie making, the story was pushed into the background. Technique was the main thing. The conversation in the Vienna coffeehouses between movie makers was about how to beat each other with movement, with lighting, with angle shots, camera tricks. Now, at Warners, people began to scream, “Look, Curtiz is using double exposures, he is moving the camera; he is even putting glycerin in front of the lens. . . . The man is crazy.” It was necessary for Dolores Costello to become dizzy in Mike’s picture, so he put glycerin on the lens, so that at that point in the action everything would seem dizzy to the audience too. The cutters paled

when they saw those rushes, and muttered, "Great Godfrey! Everything is melting!"

Since he had established himself as an authority on criminals, the studio gave him Texas Moon to do. "I know as much about Texas as I have not know about American criminals," Mike said. "For Texas Moon I live in the Los Angeles Public Library, reading about Texas with an interpreter to help me."

Mike is still studying America. "I see scenes in drive-in restaurants or bars I can use," he said. "Once, in a little bar, I see a sailor. All the time he is flipping a coin. Finally he jump up and talked to his sweetheart on the telephone. It was easy to see in his mind. He and his sweetheart have quarreled. He leave it to that coin whether he call her up or not. That coin do not give him right answer first few times, so he keep flipping it until it tell him to call her. Later I use that scene in a film. Many times I go to night court or Salvation Army or to a reception under a tent in some big shot's back yard, where everybody is smother with orchids. In all those places are scenes I use.

"In forty-eight hours after I arrive in New York I learn not to swallow chewing gum," he said. "The second thing I notice about America is that everybody in Hollywood is called 'darling.' It is a nice, sweet word. The third thing I find in this country is the equality in any man born from a mother. Everybody is human beings. I learn democracy here. Where I came from wasn't freedom. When I am a little kid I am on the street, a policeman pass and say, 'Long live king and beat the Jew.' When I come here, the buildings are marvelous; but most important, always the underdog is the hero. I observe and I never forget.

"I know Joan Crawford will get the Academy Award in Mildred Pierce, because I know this country's psychology. She was the underdog; she was downbeaten. A famous ex-star trying to fight her way back. In America, in a prize fight, when a guy is knocked down, all pipples pull for him. When I start working with her, she has terrific mannerisms, thick lip rouge, big shoulder pads, and eyelashes so thick you can't see her eye. I tell her throw away everything

you have brought from other studios all these years. Even throw your lines away. You will be down to earth. She listen, she do it. Only a talented and honest actress would have listen to me."

But while Mike understands some American institutions, he has retained a certain naïveté concerning others. For example, the automobile.

There is a possibility that a lack of understanding of automotive mechanics even delayed his marriage. During his first week in Hollywood he met Bess Meredyth, one of the screen's top writers. She was going to the beach for the week end; Mike seemed lonesome, and she invited him down over Sunday. He arrived in a rented car and drove it hub deep into the sand. The beach party spent the afternoon getting it out. It was three years before Bess Meredyth decided to marry him.

Mike is one of the few citizens of Hollywood who were really surprised when they won an Oscar. Most of those who get to their feet wide-eyed and "unprepared" when they receive an Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Award would only have been surprised if they hadn't got it. When Mike stood up to accept his Oscar for directing the best picture of 1943—*Casablanca*—he was caught with his speech down.

When Robin Hood was being considered for an Irving Thalberg Award, Hal Wallis and Curtiz, who had made it, spent the evening before the Academy dinner writing and tearing up acceptance speeches by the basketful. But Robin Hood just missed. When another Wallis-Curtiz picture, *Angels With Dirty Faces*, was nominated, the pair went through the same wringer—with the same result. Still later they came up with another Academy Award candidate in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. There was more midnight speech writing; only to end, as Curtiz put it, "always a bridesmaid and never a mother."

So, when Mike was nominated for the best direction of the year for *Casablanca* and Hal Wallis was nominated for the Irving Thalberg Award for the best production record of the year, they relaxed. They had been through it all before. Nothing would happen.

When their names were read out, they were quite honestly amazed. "When I accept the Academy Award, I tell the audience the truth," Mike said. "I tell them, 'So many times I have speech ready, but no dice. Now I win, I have no speech.' Pipple say it is the best speech of the evening."

Mike has the only "type bank" in existence. "In my memory I keep it," he said. He never forgets a face and almost never remembers a name. But he catalogues in his mind as a type each bit or featured player who applies to him for a job. If he needs such a type, he calls the Warner casting office and says something like this: "Send me the little and pinched-looking man with gray temples. I talked to him when we were making *Captain Blood*." Ordinarily this wouldn't be easy, but the Warner casting office is used to Mike. It keeps a list of the people he interviews during the making of every picture, together with a descriptive paragraph or two.

While Mike is famed as a creator of a new language, his pronouncements on Hollywood and the business of working and living there make hard sense. "I tell you something which very few people in Hollywood like to hearing," he said. "Everything we do has been done before, even though we present it in a different way."

Curtiz once remarked, "I put all the art into my pictures I think the audience can stand." Yet his greatest condemnation of anything is, "This is too motion picture"—meaning too arty, too cheaply theatrical.

"We are not out here to preaching with pictures, to take political sides or bring a great message. We are here to entertain." Mike says this feelingly. He also proclaims that "Moving picture is the cruelest business in the world. You must be like a boxer all the time, with your left hand out. I have a book printed in 1920. It is a blue list of movie greats. Only three men in that book are still working. In Europe, if an actor or director establish himself, he live forever. Here, if he doesn't make dough, they kick him out. Hollywood is money, money, money, and the nuts with everything else. How can

any man be conceited when he sees the climb and then the awful nose dive?”

Mike has demonstrated that he can defeat almost any effort to help him cope with the perils of English. Reading from a speech that had been carefully typed out for him, as a part of the fanfare accompanying the opening of *Night and Day*, his inability to put English words together in their accepted order was still apparent. “This man Cole Porter,” says Curtiz, “he stuck to purpose of making good music, come hell or hayride.”

The notoriety he has won chipping away at English is, to use his own phrase, “A flea in my ointment. I know I make mistakes in English, a high-school student would not make, but I did not go to high school in America. I don’t like publicity on my dialogue. It is same like saying a film is bad because the woman in front of you wears a big hat.”

Among classic Curtizisms is his irate threat to an ineffectual fellow worker, “The next time I send a dumb so-and-so to do something, I go myself.” This is one Curtizism whose meaning is twisted—as well as its words. There is nothing dumb about Mike. His intelligence is Grade A. That intelligence has been rewarded in substantial fashion. In 1946 he collected \$258,600 from Warner Brothers. His present setup with Warners is that of a company within a company. He is spending his own money on the films he makes but he will choose his own stars, his own stories, will share in a percentage of the money his pictures make.

To coin a Curtizism—without benefit of help from the master—“As a movie maker he is a ball on fire.”

Curtiz is only one of many Hollywood personalities who is liberally splashed with color in a crazy-quilt design. If Horatio Alger and Damon Runyon had collaborated on a success yarn, the result would have been much like the story of the movie producers, the King Brothers. Interviewing the brothers King is like interviewing an automat. Drop in a question and the interview drops out seasoned with uninhibited details and garnished with verbal parsley. Their grammatical pyrotechnics are as dizzy as their rocket rise. With

such deathless phrases as, "We were standing on the brink of an abscess," Frank, the Man Mountain King, and Morris, the "artistic" King, came perilously close to wrestling the Mr. Malaprop title from more noted rivals.

Even in Hollywood, where "characters" are a dime a gross and a man must grow a purple beard or have fiery crosses blazing from his ears to attract even passing notice, the brothers are big-league individualists. Before the twain face-lifted their name from Kozinsky to King, they started with one slot machine, then a legal device, and \$300. That was in 1931, when Frank was seventeen. The machine was secondhand and the \$300 was borrowed from a girl next door. In no time at all, they were the largest slot-machine operators in the world, with 19,000 one-armed bandits and juke boxes and a couple of million dollars laid away for mad money. In 1937, they paid the Government an income tax of \$87,000. For recreation they started a racing stable and wound up owning a horse that finished fifth in the Santa Anita Handicap.

In a miraculously short time they had behind them a record of seven independent motion-picture productions made for release through Monogram Pictures Corp., none of which has failed to make money, although, according to Hollywood standards, they were made for peanuts. Among them are: *Johnny Doesn't Live Here* (Simone Simon, James Ellison, Bill Terry); *Unknown Guest* (Victor Jory, Pamela Blake); *I Escaped From the Gestapo* (Dean Jagger, Mary Brain, John Carradine).

The *Unknown Guest* opened in Hollywood's famed Grauman's Chinese Theater, a feat no independent producer had achieved up to that time. But striking twelve in a new field has not changed the Kings. They wear crowns embroidered on their sweat shirts to match their regal name, but the hearts that beat under this flamboyant splendor are the same that pulsed in their slot-machine-Kozinsky heyday. Fortunately for their movie aspirations, the King pulse seems to beat in unison with that of the public who shove coins across the counters in cinema ticket booths.

Their leap from salting away nickels to the sensations of movie-dom is one of the industry's most fantastic sagas.

“We did it on short money,” said Frank. “At the big studios they waste time and cash. When you pay the kind of dough they do, you got to run around in circles to make believe you're earning it. We were the first little people who tried to get good people to work for us. Our stuff has a reputation for suspense. The secret is to let the people figure out the suspense for themselves. In our pictures, it gradually dawns on the audience that a guy is a killer. We don't slap 'em in the puss with a freight car to sell 'em the idea. These horror pictures like Joe Glutz in *The Human Ghoul* stink. They're for kids. If y'know what I mean.”

The Kings' belief in themselves almost amounts to idolatry. “I don't want to say things in a boosting way,” said Frank, “but in our short life, whatever we've been in, we've gone to the top. I've heard there is a kids' yarn called the King of the Golden River. That's us. Only there's more than one king in our deck.”

They believe in each other too. “You ought to talk to Morrie,” Frank told me. “He's one of the smartest guys in Hollywood. Just to show you how smart Morrie is, he'll pick five magazine stories a week he figures would make good movies. When I check on them, I find a lot of them have been sold to studios for important money. Morrie is very artistic that way. Like, for instance, this story we're shooting right now we paid three hundred dollars for. We were offered sixty-five thousand for it after we bought it.”

Frank's account of the King Brothers' entry into the movie business is of a piece with the King crazy-quilt pattern. Somewhere, Frank saw one of those uke boxes into which you drop a nickel, ask an invisible female to play your favorite number, and she answers back with a voice full of soothing sirup. Why not make a machine that would show people talking or singing, thereby titillating the public eye as well as its ear, Frank asked himself. He turned two mechanics loose on the idea, and they came up with a product mechanically oke, although it looked like a casket. About that time a couple of competitors entered the field with similar

contrivances, among them a company in which Jimmy Roosevelt had an interest.

"So I ask myself have I got to compete against the President too?" Frank said. "The next thing was, where were we going to get our movies? So along comes this lawyer and asks me how would I like to go partners with some big movie shots. One of them was Cecil De Mille. We had to wait two weeks to see Mr. De Mille, and it burned me. So, finally, De Mille says he's going to make ten pictures at his ranch for us to use. I got the idea. He wanted bubble dancers—that kind of stuff. I said, 'No, I want Crosby.' We couldn't agree, so I resigned. Then I called De Mille on the phone and said, 'I don't know how to make pictures, but we're going to make big ones. And every time we make one, I'm going to send you an announcement.' I've sent him seven so far. I guess he throws them in the wastebasket, but it makes me feel good.

"There is a fellow named Arthur Samuels who knows all about movies, so I ask him, 'How do you get into a studio?' He tells me there is a place where you can rent space, and no charges until you start. Then I asked him, 'Where do you get actors?' So I called up a lot of agents. When it comes to picking directors, I figured experience was the thing. I told Frank, 'If a guy can make forty pictures, he can make forty-one, can't he?' We put in little touches of our own and made *Paper Bullets*, a movie about a municipal election, the picture that put Alan Ladd on the map."

At first, Morrie, not understanding movie lingo, thought he was being double-crossed. "When I see my first rushes," he remembered, "there's a guy at the beginning of each scene with a slate with a number on it. He makes a kind of banging noise on the slate, so I let out a squawk, 'How did that guy get in my movie? He's lousing it up.' Somebody wised me up that was how they kept track of each shot. I didn't know from nothing about the business. But we made thirty grand over and above the nineteen grand our first picture cost us."

Skeptics said the Kings were fools for luck. The doubting Thomases couldn't have been wider of the mark. The brothers

simply never got it through their heads that it was necessary to squander a million dollars to make a picture, or piffle away weeks and months shooting it. While one scene is being shot, the actors for the next one are on their marks, like track stars, all set and ready to go. Their sets are compact. They don't throw film around like some self-elected Hollywood geniuses. Their overhead is virtually nonexistent. "We don't have long-term contracts with big names," says Frank. "At first, we had trouble getting good people. Actors thought B pictures like ours would be shown in joints and honky-tonks. Beating down that B complex was murder, and I don't mean vitamins. Now they're finding out we use good make-up men, good hairdressers, competent sound engineers, technicians and writers. We want our actors to say, "What has MGM got the Kings haven't got?"

Watching the Kings sign a player is an experience. They needed a woman and a man to double for Simone Simon and James Ellison in the acrobatic feat of climbing through a transom. "This part is liable to make you," Frank told the transom climbers, who were slightly dazed by so much eloquence. "It's not just a bit part. You come down out of that transom like Muni or Garbo, and agents will be after you with lassos."

The industry can't figure the pair. They are flying in the face of the kind of thinking that hired a famous character actor for a day, shot him putting on and taking off a mask, and built an eighteen-part serial around those two scenes. The actor appeared for a few feet only at the beginning of Part I and at the end of Part XVIII. The sixteen other installments featured a pillowy masked man resembling the famed actor. The Kings shoot a picture in two or three weeks, and cut corners, but they don't produce a cheap product. The idea is beginning to percolate that maybe they are not long for the wrong side of the production tracks.

The Zanucks, the Warners and Louis B. Mayers of Bedlam on the Wilshire awoke to find a double-page ad in the Hollywood Variety, challenging the entire industry to a contest. The King Brothers were willing to bet that their current Monogram picture would be

more packed with suspense than any movie made by any other studio. And they stood ready to contribute \$500 to charity if they lost the decision.

Even in this grandiose gesture their hatred of waste was apparent. It was pointed out to them that \$500 was a paltry item in a community where six-figure sums are commonplace. They refused to raise the ante. "Five hundred bucks is five hundred bucks," they said firmly.

The statement underestimated their own talents. In their hands, 500 bucks was quite often the price of a story from which a \$50,000 property is made, with enough left over for a few cans of raw film.

When my interview with the Kings—ex-Kozinsky—was over, Morrie King stood up to go. "When you come to write about us," he said, "calm it down a little, pal. Y'know what I mean?" I am still trying to figure out how that can be done.

Morrie and Frank don't make their movies so quickly or so cheaply any more. They have grown bigger and more respectable. With such opuses as "Dillinger" behind them, they are looking around for new and more expensive worlds to conquer.

5. *Off Beat*

Fashions in eccentricity are constantly shifting in Hollywood. You can't count on an off-beat character staying put. A bearded, bicycling, double-sleeping bag, dungareed man named Eden Ahbez leaves a song called *Nature Boy* at a stage door; a man named King Cole sings it; and the movie colony has a new wonder, replacing yesterday's extravagant personalities—personalities like John Carradine's.

Ichabod Crane and John Carradine have two things in common. Both are tall and lean. Both have had legends built around them. The legend of *Sleepy Hollow* features a headless horseman, but the legend of John Carradine offers other oddities just as startling. The difference between the two is that much, if not all, of the Carradine fantasy is truth instead of fiction.

He arrived in Los Angeles as chaperon of a carload of bananas. He tested his deep baritone voice in the nighttime vastness of an empty Hollywood Bowl, scaring the daylights out of startled neckers in the rear rows and sleeping householders near by. Along with Alan Dinehart and Norman Foster he was a contestant in a diaper derby. He appeared in his first three movies as a ghost voice for other actors whose own tones needed vocal lubrication.

In his early impecunious Hollywood days, he trod crowded streets clad in a generous friend's too-small, cast-off overcoat, worn as an Inverness cape, declaiming Shakespearean soliloquies, and mystifying blasé pedestrians who thought that up to then they had seen everything. Asked to appear in Shakespearean roles in the Pasadena

Playhouse, he was often so pressed for nickels that he couldn't purchase a trolley ride and thumbed his way to play the starring role in *Hamlet*.

At one time, his only rival for Hollywood quaintness was a hairy character known as Peter the Hermit, a reincarnated Moses with a flowing white robe, sandals and staff, somehow resurrected after twenty dead centuries and marching imperiously down Hollywood Boulevard. The Hermit was reported to have blenched and slunk away after catching his first sight of Carradine, recognizing in the reedy newcomer an imperious insolence beside which his own hauteur became pallid. The Hermit is still busily hermiting, and Carradine now utters the Bard's lines for hard cash in his own Shakespearean productions.

Carradine is attenuated and saturnine, with a face he likes to fancy is as cameo-cut as the late John Barrymore's, whom he extravagantly admired. But there is nothing skinny about his voice. He can turn it on and off like an organ stop or frighten little children with it, as he seemed about to do in Shirley Temple's *Captain January*. He was assigned to hiss a warning in this film, and did it so well that Darryl Zanuck took him out of the production for fear the juvenile audiences who flocked to each Temple picture would collapse in hysterics.

In his time before the movie camera, Carradine has appeared in some 175 different roles, and has run the gamut of directors from John Ford to De Mille. Before he decided to risk his savings on his own Shakespearean-repertory company, he had knitted his brows, flared his nostrils and rumbled his chest tones so effectively that his weekly price tag to appear before the camera was \$3500.

A few years ago, however, when he was not above dropping into an eating place to do a little pearl diving or declaim "To be or not to be" for coffee and cakes, De Mille saw an apparition pass him, reciting the gravedigger's lines from *Hamlet*. De Mille was casting odd types for the *Sign of the Cross*, and instructed Carradine to report to him the following day. During the recording of the mob scenes, a deep baritone vibrated against the maestro's sensitive ears.

As a result, the rival of Peter the Hermit recited the Beatitudes, which were later dropped into the mouth of another actor.

Carradine's father was a newspaperman with the Associated Press in London. His mother, Genevieve Winifred Richmond Carradine, is a physician who lives in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. His grandfather was cofounder of the Holy Rollers. At the age of sixteen the Holy Roller's grandson landed in New York. For a while, he worked as a quick-sketch artist and scenery painter. Applying for the part of the Christlike stranger in a play called *Window Panes*, he was given a low-comedy role instead, and played a simple-minded Russian peasant named Peter. The play was a success, and, convinced by this that Hollywood needed him, Carradine started for California, flat broke; his ticket an elegantly uplifted thumb.

Perhaps no other dusty itinerant has ever thumbed a ride clad in a Homburg hat, spats and bat-wing collar. Thus attired, Carradine attracted more than passing notice on the back roads of the deep South.

"I made excellent time until I reached Louisiana," he says. "After that, in every large town I hit, I hunted up an art store and purchased paper and drawing board on the cuff; then I would work the office buildings, persuading busy executives to pose for a quick sketch. If the sitter was satisfied, the price was two and a half dollars each. It cost him nothing if he thought it was a turkey. I made as high as ten to fifteen dollars a day in that way. Then I would move into the best hotel and order the finest dishes its restaurant afforded. By the end of the week I would be accepted as an eccentric but devout genius, and be invited to sing solos in the First Methodist Church. It is a base canard that I reached Los Angeles riding in a refrigerator car. I rode in style in a chair car as a banana messenger. I was a courier accompanying the banana train, and I carried the necessary waybills."

There were a few minor duties for Carradine to perform in addition to lugging waybills. It was necessary for him to leap out, run along beside the train, open doors to check on temperature and

ventilation, and adjust vents to preserve the fruit. There was nothing stylish about his entry into the City of the Angels. His Homburg hat blew out of the train window. He pulled a stop cord, which brought the locomotive to a bone-jarring stop, jumped out and retrieved it. The train crew informed him testily that it cost the company \$500 to stop a train in that fashion, what with lost time, overhead running up, extra fuel burned, and such items. Carradine found himself standing beside the roadbed when the locomotive pulled on. Adjusting his Homburg jauntily, he walked the rest of the way.

For five years he waited for a break. During that time, his stomach shrank. He became ravenously hungry—so famished, in fact, that he ate two meals in rapid succession one night while the donors of the victuals stood outside of the window watching him and placing bets as to whether or not an interior unused to such lush provender would stand the strain. He sums up those years by saying, "The whole thing was a struggle between Carradine the nonconformist, and Carradine the distinguished gentleman."

When, at last, opportunity tapped at his door—a real chance, and not a ghost-voice opportunity—the knocking was done by John Ford, who was preparing to film *The Prisoner of Shark Island*. Ford collected types and unrecognized talent as other men hive up Chippendale furniture or American primitive paintings. His roving eye saw in Carradine a perfect character for the role of the villainous prison guard who stood watch over Doctor Mudd during that persecuted man's Dry Tortugas banishment.

Once in the chips, Carradine discarded the hand-me-down overcoat flung rakishly across his hat-rack shoulders, and went in for sartorial splendor and purchased a block-long Duesenberg—a custom-built car, and the only one of its type in town. Four other aspiring actors had made down payments on this mass of shining machinery before Carradine, but none of them had been up to the task of completing its purchase. Carradine became the first actually to consummate the deal and receive ownership papers.

Next he became the proud, if occasionally bewildered, owner of a sixty-five-foot schooner yacht. It is rumored that twice the Coast

Guard went to his rescue. Once when he tossed over the anchor and either went down with it or couldn't get it up when he wanted to sail—accounts vary—and once more when he couldn't get his auxillary motor started and began to drift. Carradine is inclined to brand the stories of his rescues "vicious attacks on my nautical power" and "whispering campaigns conducted by scoundrels."

The accounts of his first meeting with John Barrymore are legion. One story has him knocking at the Barrymore door on a rainy, blustery night and introducing himself by saying, "I'm John Carradine. I've always admired your portrayal of Hamlet, and I want to get your inner reaction to Hamlet, the man." After which, he and Barrymore tossed tag ends of Shakespeare back and forth all night, like beanbags, and ended by sleeping on the floor. Another and popular version of the story starts out the same way, but ends with Carradine and Barrymore staging a furious duel with foils on the trampled greensward.

When Barrymore died, Carradine flung himself into a mourning act which played the town's leading *bistros* until friends persuaded him it would be more seemly to give way to his grief in private.

The sets for Carradine's own Hamlet were the ones Barrymore used in London, altered to fit the needs of Pacific Coast playhouses. Carradine found himself the sole owner of the Barrymore scenery and props as the result of the business briskness of one Milton Owen. The Hamlet production was put on the auction block after the Great Profile's death, and Owen absent-mindedly opened the bidding with \$7.50. The auctioneer practically jumped down Owen's throat with joy and closed the bidding. Owen, who still doesn't know why he bid even \$7.50, felt very much like an apartment dweller who had won a horse at a Sunday-school-picnic raffle. He wildly canvassed the field of Barrymore-Shakespeare addicts, and Carradine's name popped into his mind. Half an hour later, he had sold the whole kit and kaboodle to the ex-banana chaperon for \$250.

At first blush, such anecdotes seem to be japery perpetrated at Carradine's expense. But Carradine can afford a few laughs up his

sleeve at the jokesters. When the expense of designing and building a new set is considered, the Barrymore production was a bargain. Nor are his vagaries always as cockeyed as they seem. Cast as a bull-fighter, he felt the need of practicing the matador's art against a living menace. Soon the neighbors were edified by the sight of Carradine's small son, Bruce, pawing the ground and charging his parent wearing a papier-mâché bull's head, complete with horns, while a childish mooing emerged from under the painted head. Clucking dolefully, the onlookers retired, muttering, "This time poor old Carradine has really gone off his rocker." But the Carradine portrayal that reached the screen might have walked out of a Barcelona bull ring, and the pitied one had racked up still another striking screen characterization.

Having proved that crime and villainy pay well—at least when portrayed on the screen—Carradine engaged in making a lifelong ambition to play classical drama ring a merry tune on the box-office cash register. His three weeks' run at the Pasadena Playhouse before going on tour broke that theater's Shakespearean record. In San Francisco, he outgrossed Maurice Evans' Hamlet of three years before. His return engagement in Pasadena, after playing Seattle, was not so successful financially, but at the year's end he was making plans to set out across the Western half of the continent, complete with black tights and Yorick skull.

These plans were temporarily derailed by a wartime shortage of transportation, and the tour was canceled.

One thing seems apparent, however. On future travels he will not be beset with the necessity of making quick sketches at \$2.50 each or getting out at intervals to run along a banana train.

I made that prophecy about Carradine quite a while ago. For the most part he has lived up to it. Since then, he has bestowed his rich, rare, ripe, unorthodox personality upon several Broadway productions. Nor have the critics always scoffed when he stalked on stage.

Some of Hollywood's off-beat characters have ridden their inborn eccentricity in a hell-for-leather race to get on in the world. Deliberately and cannily they have given free rein to some quirk lurking

in their make-up that helps them earn a better than comfortable living, although with a determined throttling-down of their unusual talents, they might have been successful advertising salesmen—or motorcycle racers.

The first time Dan Duryea—he has been called “the screen’s consummate jerk” and “most despicable heel”—discovered that he had been born to screen rascality, the thought thudded into his consciousness with a sickening jar.

While working as a salesman for a Philadelphia advertising firm, he spent a week end with friends in Syracuse. When there he took part in making a back-yard, amateur movie. It was the kind of project of which someone says, “I’ve written the funniest doggone script. . . . All you’ve got to do is this, then I’ll do that. . . . It’ll be a panic, pal!”

Turning on all the charm he had, Duryea flung himself wholeheartedly into the enterprise.

The next time he visited Syracuse the picture was projected for him. Looking at it, he brooded about the same things any other man worries about at such a time—whether he seemed gawkish and amateurish; whether or not his hairline was receding. Suddenly, with a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, he found himself worrying about something else. Despite the charm he’d slathered on, the pictured Duryea he saw on the screen was an unlovely punk he wouldn’t have staked to a cup of coffee if he’d found him starving on the street. Through some freak of physiognomy, plus an ability—so hair-triggered that he cannot always control it—to let his projected personality change him into an ugly duckling, he had arrived on that screen looking the way a stinkweed smells.

“It was an extremely disturbing experience,” he told me, when I met him in Hollywood not long ago. “Certainly I hadn’t intended to be that way.”

A persistent friend was responsible for our meeting. “There’s a slant there you ought to look into,” she said. “He’s a nice guy, but being tough on the screen makes it tough for him in lots of other ways. Some of them you wouldn’t believe. People keep their

fingers crossed when they meet Dan. They're determined not to let him persuade them that he's an all-right citizen."

In spite of such talk, my fingers were still crossed when I went to see him.

Duryea is tall and blond. His eyes are blue and off the screen are devoid of the cold, bright glitter of menace. Pridefully he showed me the greenhouse he had put together with his own hands. It perched on the brink of a hilltop plot back of his home in the Hollywood hills. Watching him poke a finger into black loam, it was hard to think of him as the personification of evil that so many moviegoers see in him. No producer in his right mind would have tossed the flower cultivator I was seeing in against the fast competition offered by the screen's other stinkers.

The field is a small but select one. Invariably the demand for movie jerks exceeds the available supply. Hollywood describes this shortage by saying: "There are more stinking actors than acting stinkers." But flower lover or not, Dan Duryea is a large shot in his own peculiar subdivision of movie stinkerness. This branch of the movie profession is highly specialized. There are gangster-type stinkers, Western-heavy-type stinkers, mortgage-foreclosure-type stinkers, Nazi- and Jap-type stinkers. And casting directors are now beating the bushes for Soviet-type stinkers. Among the urbane, brittle-dialogue, smoothie stinkers are George Sanders, Vincent Price and Clifton Webb. English-type matinee-idol stinkers are exemplified by James Mason. A corpulent, English-type stinker has been invented by Sydney Greenstreet, whose obesity seems twice as horrific because, traditionally, fat men are supposed to be jolly.

Hume Cronyn—the warden in *Brute Force* and the repellent father in *The Green Years*—leads the sadistic-type stinkers by several lengths of open track, having passed another screen-sadist favorite, Peter Lorre, in the stretch. Lorre, known to connoisseurs of scariness as the man with cold-poached-egg eyes, showed a lot of early foot, but has largely forsaken the kind of thing that made audiences breathe in strangled gasps when they saw his first chiller, the German-made murder movie, *M*. More and more he has gone in

for burlesquing villainy, as have Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff. Neither of these is a 100-per-cent-serious stinker any more. They carry menace to such absurd lengths that their performances satirize the roles in which they once conscientiously monstered, zombied, werewolfed and bugged their eyes.

There are a number of impressive minor stinkers, each of them capable of marrow-chilling performances. Among these are Richard Widmark, who played the young hoodlum creep with the sinister giggle in *Kiss of Death*; Joseph Calleia—*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The Cross of Lorraine*; Porter Hall—in *Double Indemnity*, *Murder, He Says*, and a Macy's psychiatrist in *Miracle on 34th Street*; Albert Dekker; Eduardo Ciannelli; and Walter Slezak—a leading por-trayer of Nazi stinkers during the late war. As far as film footage is concerned, they are not quite up to the Greenstreets, Bogarts, Sanderses, Masons and Duryeas, but they often turn in repulsive jobs the fans remember more vividly than those done by the stars.

Then there are what Damon Runyon called the "McGoofs." A McGoof is—on the screen—a no-good cad who mooches from women. When those ladies cease to interest him and he has siphoned away their bank rolls, he gives them a brutal brushoff. Duryea is widely acclaimed as the films' No. 1 McGoof.

His prestige in this kind of movie scaliness is enhanced by the fact that few of his opposition have been as consistently nasty on the screen as he has. Edward G. Robinson started out as a film gangster, but, as one talent scout put it, "he cleaned himself up." Basil Rathbone "cleaned himself up" as Sherlock Holmes. Vincent Price went to the laundry as the detective in *Moss Rose*. In *The Pied Piper*, *Holy Matrimony* and *The Bishop's Wife*, Monty Woolley more or less divested himself of the acid-tongue trade-mark he acquired in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

In *The Petrified Forest* and *High Sierra*, Humphrey Bogart was the screen's No. 1 hoodlum. But of late, Bogart, as often as not, sides with law and order as a private detective. Although the detective's ethics are not high, he shows righteous indignation when someone suggests that he sell out a client. And he usually gets the

girl, which automatically lifts him out of the ranks of pure stinkers into a twilight zone called a "romantic heavy."

Being a "romantic heavy" is the goal of all screen stinkers who believe in their own acting ability, and most of them can beat the average leading man to a frazzle when it comes to knowing their way around the cinematic or legitimate stage.

The process works in reverse too. Stars like Robert Montgomery, Charles Boyer and Fred MacMurray suffer from chronic itch to have a fling at raw and gutty roles. They dream of a switchover from bandying chitchat with bosomy charmers to appearing in something challenging and meaty. Once in a while they thump front-office desks so violently and to such effect that they are given a tough-mug part to calm them.

Montgomery got his chance at stinkedom in *Night Must Fall*. In it he played a young man who came to live with a sweet old lady, carrying with him a hatbox containing a human head. Boyer's try at stinkedom was his psychopathic persecution of Ingrid Bergman in *Gaslight*. The closest MacMurray came to undiluted scalawaggery was as the fall guy in *Double Indemnity*. But Barbara Stanwyck, a pretty nifty screen stinker herself—if given the opportunity—got the choice unpleasant assignment in that production. Tyrone Power went seamy in *Nightmare Alley* and has not been too happy about it. Cary Grant took a flier at muckerism in *Suspicion*, but the studio crossed him up by sticking a Boy Scoutish ending on that film.

Although stinker roles fascinate the big stars, the fascination is apt to prove fatal at the box office. Such ventures often draw critical acclaim in the large, sophisticated centers of population, but fail to please in small-town and rural areas, where the movie public resents having someone they've trusted through many a reel of true-blue heroism turn quick-like-a-rat into a wastrel.

Those who dwell in what New York and Hollywood call "the provinces"—meaning the large, breezy areas that lie between those two cities—are able to swallow gangsters, holdup men, desperadoes, thieves, murderers, cattle rustlers, cutpurses and cutthroats without gagging. But they find it difficult to gulp massive doses of McGoofs,

those slimy guys who prey on women and are cravens in a slugging match—except with a dame.

Duryea has made one or two breaks for freedom from stinkedom, but each time the public's insistence that he be filmed as a guy minus morals has tossed him right back into Heel Row. Faced with the suggestion of casting him as anything but a jerk, producers ask themselves if audiences will believe him as a non-jerk.

Putting him in a likable role has come to be what Hollywood calls "off-casting."

Duryea didn't try to escape because of any dissatisfaction with stinker pay. He mentioned to me the atrocious Hollywood pun cooked up to describe actors of his breed: "Thar's gold in them heels." Screen crime pays rich dividends. In Duryea's case, it jumped him from a salary of twenty-five dollars a week in summer stock to a yearly take of well over \$100,000.

His reasons for wanting to beat his type-casting rap are more complex than any financial ones.

We walked back to his sprawling and comfortable house, where his wife, Helen, was waiting for us with a tray of sandwiches and tall glasses of milk. As we ate, Duryea told me about the pitfalls that beset a successful screen jerk.

"There is always the chance that because you've clicked as a heel with the movie public you'll think it smart to be one all the time," he said. "If a heavy isn't careful, he begins to believe his own publicity and starts living up to the legend his movie parts have built around him. I've had a sound bringing-up, a good college education and six years of business experience as an advertising man. Those things give me some perspective. If I started to be one of those actors who're 'on' twenty-four hours a day, the Cornell Grad Duryea and the Space Salesman Duryea would tap me on the noggin and say, 'Snap out of it, you silly oaf.'"

Helen Duryea interrupted to say, "Not long ago when Dan's mother, back in White Plains, New York, met her new pastor, she sat down with him and explained to him that her son wasn't really the kind of person he saw in the movies at all."

Despite the fact that Duryea's mother felt called upon to enlighten the pastor about her boy's true character, she never reproaches him for the roles he plays.

"She sees each of my pictures four or five times," Dan said. "She says it's like visiting with me, although it means that she visits some pretty repulsive characters. A mother has a way of seeing behind any mask her son assumes. The public hasn't."

The Duryeas have managed to be fond parents and to remain compatibly married without making a parade of it, although in the psychotic community in which they live, such miraculous phenomena are usually trumpeted to high heaven when they occur. However, not long ago even Dan and Helen conformed to the accepted pattern. In accordance with the local belief that everything, even a fruit market, must have a whoop-de-do "preemeer," they were chosen, as Hollywood's most ideally married couple, to "open" a bridal suite in a new Las Vegas hotel.

Two very active Dan Duryea fan clubs have sprung up to honor him. Like most fan clubs, the two who worship at Duryea's shrine are ninety-nine and ninety-nine one-hundredths part female. The club members write him for advice about such things as "whether I should keep on going out with this boy or not."

To explain the secret of his appeal, a psychologist—these days one seems to pop up in every movie actor's story—suggested that such correspondents subconsciously hope that Duryea will write to them: "How about a date with me instead?"

"Each of them thinks in her heart that she alone can resurrect the fine, noble Duryea who is so deeply buried, if only she were given the opportunity," the psychologist added.

This particular psychologist entered Dan's life in a strange way. Duryea finds it impossible to down the legend of his malevolence that is lodged in the minds of the majority of his fans, who are dead sure he is a hopeless reclamation project. His mail also contains specimens of the twisted mental processes that most people think exist only in a book on abnormal psychology. Regularly, one feminine English fan sends him spicy photographs of herself. Before

mailing them, she slashes them into jagged jigsaw-puzzle bits. "She must think I'm a kind of Jack the Ripper," Duryea remarked with some puzzlement.

Other women write to tell him that when he's not busy between movies, they hope he can arrange to slap them around a little, the way he does trapped females on the screen.

When word of these bizarre postal manifestations reached the psychologist, he grabbed his notebook and burned the highways in his eagerness to meet the man who could inspire such reactions. Duryea found the interview that followed as thorough as if he were being gone over inch by inch with a Geiger counter.

"The professor must have been pretty disappointed," Helen Duryea said, passing me the sandwiches. "Reluctantly he decided that Dan wasn't really a monster at all. Dan showed him the tractor he uses for grading our hillside, and his greenhouse, and his shop, where he makes things we could buy a lot cheaper in a store.

"The brainy man came inside scratching his head and muttering something about a dichotomy running through Dan's life. After he'd gone we looked it up, and as nearly as we could figure out, it means a dual growth proceeding along two contradictory lines from one main stem. But after a little refreshment the prof brightened up, brought his notebook out and began to jot things down."

"One of his notions was that there was something about the way I walk," Dan said—"lackadaisical and carefree" he called it—that gives dames a wallop. And he figured that even the way I'd worn a flat straw hat in Scarlet Street handed them an emotional belt. He called it 'disturbingly jaunty.' He said that my voice has nasal overtones that do things to women, in spite of the fact that I've been trying to get rid of those nasal sounds for years. And he allowed as how my eyes have a 'hypnotic quality.'"

"For a while after he left, I noticed Dan looking at me fixedly and trying not to blink his eyes," Helen Duryea said, laughing.

"That hypnotic-quality stuff is the bunk," Duryea objected. "All Helen said to me was 'Are you sure you feel all right, dear?'"

I didn't tell Duryea that I'd talked him over with a psychologist

myself before I'd come to see him—not a practicing one, but a friend whose hobby is studying people and their reactions—and that he had come up with his own explanation for Duryea's drawing power.

"Why do people pay money to be repelled by him?" I'd asked.

"I hate to trot out what will sound like a tired cliché," my psychologist friend told me, "but in all probability there's wish fulfillment mixed up in it, and transference of identity. Every man has moments when he'd like to shuck off his inhibitions and slap a woman, or snarl at somebody, or unzip his good manners and expose the heel underneath. Duryea does all those things for you without causing you pain or embarrassment, and at a reasonable cost."

I asked Duryea if, when he turned on his screen menace, it helped him to remember how other heavies handled their jobs or if he consciously tried to imitate some particularly contemptible person he'd known.

"I do neither," he replied. "I just turn myself over to the ham actor who lives inside of all us guys in this business. After that, he's boss."

But whatever being a screen stinker does to his fans, it confronts Duryea with a real problem as far as his children and the people he meets in private life are concerned. When he picks up his sons, Dick and Pete—nine and five years old—at school, he notices that some of their playmates edge apprehensively away from him.

To prevent such edging and to keep his sons' teachers from judging them against a background of their father's screen characterizations, Duryea makes a special effort to ingratiate himself with the school's staff. When, as a part of this good-will program, he made playground balance boards for the school, he put four coats of paint on them instead of two, so the teachers would think him a good Joe. Yet, on the school's Fathers' Night, when he visited the classrooms to admire the students' work, his screen personality still dogged him. As a small boy bore down on him eagerly, autograph book in hand, his mother snatched him away as if Duryea had jungle rot.

"We're determined our children won't grow up to feel that way about him," Helen Duryea said. "They've seen their daddy on the screen only once. They haven't seen him in a movie since."

That once was a screening of a deluxe Western, *Along Came Jones*. In it Dan played a screen villain with such intensity that when the script called for him to grow angry at Loretta Young, a vein in his temple throbbed with a visibly violent pulse. One critic remarked afterward, "I haven't seen so much unleashed hellishness since Jeanne Eagles stood over her faithless lover in the screen version of *The Letter* and pumped lead into him."

When *Along Came Jones* showed Dan shooting it out with the film's hero, Gary Cooper, young Pete Duryea stood up in his seat and cried aloud in anguish, "Don't you dare shoot my daddy! I don't care if he is bad!"

Duryea's trouble with people identifying him with his roles began with his first big stage success, *The Little Foxes*. In this play, an actor named Carl Benton Reid played his father. Although Reid played an elderly heel himself—and he did it unpleasantly well—when his admirers trouped backstage following a performance they did everything but spray their throats with germicides at the sight of Duryea. Having seen him in the play, they'd decided that he wasn't the kind of person they wanted to know socially.

Five years in the advertising business—from 1929 through 1934—five years of showing his teeth in convincing smiles and of ignoring the nervous-indigestion butterflies fluttering in his innards—"Sometimes they felt like quail"—finally caught up with him. When he was forced to look for a less abrasive grindstone for his nose, the only other trade he knew anything about was acting. He had starred in several college plays at Cornell, and in his senior year—1929—had succeeded Franchot Tone as president of Cornell's Dramatic Club.

When Sam Goldwyn brought *The Little Foxes* to the screen in 1941, he brought Duryea to Hollywood, thus launching him in his long series of hateful screen characterizations.

In *The Little Foxes* he'd seemed a nasty youngster, the kind who ends by being expelled from a military academy for bad conduct—

even a military academy that guarantees to cure incorrigibility. On the screen his gifts expanded in scope. The movie Duryea grew to look like a man who, if sent to Sing Sing, would corrupt the inmates there and be hurriedly shifted by the warden to Dannemora as quickly as he could sign the necessary papers.

Once established as a screen heel, Duryea found himself riding a cycle of viciousness. Like a dope addict who requires bigger and bigger jolts to obtain an effect, his screen roles grew more and more unregenerate. In *Ball of Fire*, *Ministry of Fear*, *Mrs. Parkington*, *Valley of Decision*, *Along Came Jones*, *The Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street* his heart remained—for flicker purposes—as black as anthracite.

The first time he saw himself professionally on the screen was when he dropped into a theater to catch himself in a supporting role to Greer Garson in *Mrs. Parkington*. Remembering the shock of seeing himself in the amateur movie back in Syracuse, he'd stayed away from the movie, *The Little Foxes*. As his shadowy likeness appeared on the screen, a woman behind him remarked loudly to a friend, "That is the most disgusting person I've ever seen."

While such reactions are sincere compliments to his acting, Duryea could do with a shade less sincerity. "It made me shrivel," he said.

"I make a great effort to be extra pleasant the first time I meet anybody," Duryea told me. "People approach an introduction to me with their mental dukes up. If I'm lucky, I can overcome the aversion they've already built up."

I sat there looking at the pleasant, tall-windowed room and at Helen Duryea smiling admiringly at her husband. Across the lawn, with its smooth crew-cut grass, dusk was gathering in the palm-treed San Fernando Valley below. It was quite a view. *At least, being bad doesn't mean he's had to go on relief*, I thought.

I remembered that I had promised myself not to be sucked in by any "he's a nice guy in spite of his roles" flimflam, and that I had determined to keep my fingers crossed. But I was also remembering

balance boards with four coats of paint instead of two, and a tall, blond, slim-hipped man slumped shriveling in his theater seat.

And I remembered something he'd said to me earlier in the afternoon, and my fingers came uncrossed. "I almost got away from the label they've hung on me in a movie called *White Tie and Tails*," he'd said wistfully, "but the fans wouldn't go for me as *Dapper Dan*. They kept writing in to ask what had happened to *Dangerous Dan*. Maybe someday they'll let me play romantic heavies, like *Bogart*. Maybe even romantic leads, like *Gable*."

His two freckly, snub-nosed sons came through a door, crept up behind him and shouted, "Stick 'em up, daddy!"

He tried to get in character. His hands shot skyward. He twisted his face into what was supposed to be a mask of diabolical craftiness. He made a pretense of gathering himself into a crouch, ready to spring forward and slap the water pistols from the hands of his two fledgling G-men. But he put no conviction into it.

The fans who pay out money to see a Duryea with the morals of a cobra would have walked out of theaters mumbling in disgust if he had done it that way for them.

When his sons lost interest in the game and wandered away, I got the pitch. No camera was grinding. That made the difference. Duryea is a soundstage Mr. Hyde. At home he is a pleasant Doctor Jekyll.

Doctor Jekyll wasn't too happy about that Hyde role that Robert Louis Stevenson wished onto him, either.

Not only are some of Hollywood's most successful screen-heels, language-manglers, and Hamlets amazingly canny characters who play a merry tune on the country's cash registers. There are folk in Hollywood who've never seen a sound stage but being blessed with a Midas-like unorthodoxy, have also discovered the secret of transmuting baser metals into gold, a little experiment the moony medieval alchemists were never able to lick.

The Brothers Schwab, pharmacists by appointment to film royalty, are a prime example of making off-beatedness pay off. Their aspirin and phenobarbital emporium is the reverse of the usual and conven-

tional. It would, of course, be out of character if Hollywood's favorite drugstore were like any other drugstore anywhere. The Schwabs see to it that it is strictly *in* character. The neon lights coiling along its front spell their name, but it is known to its loyal patrons as The Schwabadero. This fancy label, inspired by the name of a onetime lush film colony bistro, the Trocadero, was bestowed upon it by Hollywood's mighty-mite columnist, Sidney Skolsky.

Skolsky is the Schwabadero's five-foot-four-inch elder statesman; its unpaid public relations counselor. It is his habit to mention the Schwabadero in his column in the same breath with the blazingly bespangled Hollywood niteries.

Schwabs' is not the biggest drugstore in existence. It is not even the biggest in Hollywood, but it comes very close to being the most unusual drugstore in the world. Hanson's Drugstore in New York is, perhaps, the nearest approximation to the Schwabadero. Struggling young actors and actresses make Hanson's their headquarters, too, but, as any patron of the Schwabadero will tell you, "Hanson hasn't got the Schwabs."

Schwabs' is owned and operated by four brothers—Jack, Leon, Bernard and Martin Schwab—who regard their success with a kind of harassed delight. "The place is jumping with customers every evening, especially after ten-thirty, but we don't know what causes it," says Jack Schwab.

Skolsky comes as close as anyone to putting a finger on the Schwabadero's uniqueness. "You take this element and that element, and you put them all together," he said, "and you've got a joint like this that's a character in itself—like Sam Goldwyn is a character. And it's a gold mine. It probably grosses twice as much as any other drugstore the same size anywhere."

The quality that is the Schwabadero does not appear readily to the naked eye. Walking into it is like walking into any other well-stocked, busy nonchain place of its kind. But with Skolsky standing by, like an eye-dropper-size interpreter, the real, or inner, Schwabs' becomes visible.

"First of all," Skolsky said, "you take the type people who come

in. A lot of struggling young actor guys and dolls who hope to break into pictures rent rooms near by, drop in for breakfast or breakfast and lunch combined. Mostly they lunch off a breast of choc-malt or filet of sandwich. They have coke-stretching down to an art. A coke-stretcher is a guy who can stretch a coke for two hours or more. The place is their club and office combined."

The telephone booths in the Schwabadero are always full of characters calling up Central Casting, or an agent, or a friend who might know about a job in pictures for them if they hurry. The traffic lanes in and out of the booths are so congested that the Schwabs persuaded the phone company to set up three extra booths in the vacant lot next door.

The front of the store is dubbed "the reading room." The magazine rack and stacks of periodicals are placed there. In many drugstores there are signs that read, PLEASE DO NOT HANDLE THE MAGAZINES UNLESS YOU INTEND TO BUY. "The habitués of the Schwabadero think you're queer if you buy one," said Skolsky. "At meal-times they carry a copy of Variety or the Hollywood Reporter to the counter with them. There is an unwritten law that if you get a coffee or coke stain on one, you're supposed to buy it."

The Schwabs have ways of discouraging autograph hounds. When Frank Sinatra first came to town, he was mobbed by bobby-soxers at Pasadena when he got off the train. His manager called up Schwabs' and said, "Sinatra is living here now, and he'll be coming in from time to time, and we don't want him bothered." As far as the Schwabadero was concerned, the warning was superfluous. "He comes into the place and nobody bothers him in any way," remarked Skolsky. "As a matter of fact he is ignored with such enthusiasm that he begins to worry in reverse and wonders if he's slipping."

To Jack Schwab, the average celebrity is just a character who comes in for more aspirin. "Sometimes I don't recognize the name people who come in here," he said, "and it's embarrassing for me, but not for them. Most of them don't want any fuss made over them. That's why they come. The women stars walk in with no make-up on and wearing slacks and their hair stuffed up under a

bandanna. One night some strangers who'd dropped in were complaining, 'There's nobody here who is anybody.' While all the time, two tables away were Lana Turner and Ginger Rogers."

Without any special encouragement from the brothers Schwab, a "guest-help" custom has sprung up at the Schwabadero. When time hangs heavy on their hands, the regulars drift up to the cashier's counter and begin to make change for the crowds. Occasionally one of them pinch-hits for a worker back of the soda bar and whips up choc-malts or fudge sundaes. Many a producer, publicity writer or budding starlet, lounging at ease in Schwabs' behind a glass showcase, has been approached by an eager shopper wanting to know if there is any chi-chi perfume on deck or has that shipment of cleansing tissues come in yet. Without turning a hair, those so accosted search the shelves until they find the desired product, ask one of the Schwabs the price and wrap it up to take out.

When the two regular delivery boys are out on a run, medicines or other items needed in a hurry are frequently dropped off at the homes of the ailing by a Schwab customer on his way home.

At times the brothers go to such lengths in helpfulness, it seems remarkable that they have any time left for anything else.

A Schwab service includes running an unofficial rental office. A group of friendly real-estate brokers notify the Schwabs when an apartment or a house is about to be vacated, and the Schwabs, who are constantly besieged with requests for such information, divvy up the tips among the homeless. Peter Lorre, desperate for a bed in which to close his poached-egg eyes, was eased into a home through Schwab assistance.

At one time there was a drugstore right across the street. The Schwabadero was barely conscious of its presence, but one night their attention was forcibly drawn to it. At eleven forty-five the phone rang. Leon Schwab took the call, and a woman's voice said, "I wonder if you'll do me a favor. Will you look across the street and see if the drugstore there is closed?" Obediently, Leon went to the front of the store, looked and reported to the unknown questioner. "If you hurry, I think you can still make it. It's still lit up."

None of the Schwabs seemed to think Leon's helpfulness of this occasion anything out of the ordinary.

Customers and even total strangers seem to feel free to call the Schwabadero any time—day or night and even after closing hours—to demand assistance in obtaining transportation. When such calls come, the Schwabs dash madly into the street to flag a passing cabbie. If they fail, they return crestfallen and say into the phone, "Leave your number and address, and we'll call you when we get one." If a customer is unable to pay his taxi bill—and a lot of them are trying to get along on very short money—the Schwabs pay it for him and put it on his bill.

But the Schwabs take care of the needy in even more elaborate ways. A writer-director, having fallen upon lean days, was unable to pay his bills, and his water was cut off. All he had to drink in his home was a cellar filled with champagne, put there during one of his prosperous periods. For a while he tried drinking the contents of the quarts, magnums and jeroboams he had stored away, but instead of quenching his thirst, his libations only seemed to increase it. In desperation he tried selling his water substitute to the Schwabs. The Schwabs had plenty of champagne on hand, but they bought it anyhow, and with the money that changed hands, the parched one paid up his back water rent and was able to live normally once more.

"Every day we ship stuff to people around the country," said Jack Schwab. "Christmas a year ago, a fashionable store in New York ran out of perfumes and referred more people to us than we could take care of. Our cigar stock was called the best in the country by an American cigarette-and-cigar-company publication."

The Schwabadero also does a large business in whiskies and wines and cashes upwards of 150 checks a week end and as many as 10,000 in a year's time. But last year, the checks that bounced added up to the amazingly low total of seventy-five dollars. A list of those now on the upbeat who were fed by Schwabs' on a credit basis while they were "looking around" would make fascinating reading, if the Schwabs would supply it.

Around ten-thirty the Schwabadero "floor show" begins. There are no entertainers and no music, and the "show" consists merely of a lot of people standing around talking to each other. Ten-thirty is apparently the hour when the faithful feel a compulsion to drop whatever they're doing and visit Schwabs' to mingle with the gang. By eleven, standees are three and four deep in front of the counter and are spilling out into every nook and cranny of the place.

That the Schwabadero has a flavor all its own can be vouched for by a dog named Cash. Cash appeared one night just when the floor show was getting under way. He sniffed the patrons in friendly fashion, then, at closing time, trotted out. After that, he was a frequent visitor. One evening a refugee from Nazi-held France was among those present. Seeing Cash, he let out a cry of joy and embraced him. Those who witnessed the reunion discovered that Cash belonged to a writer named Robert Thoeren, author of the screen play, *Mrs. Parkington*. Both Cash and Thoeren had been famous in Parisian café circles before the German occupation. Cash had been fond of the night life on Montparnasse and had been an intimate of actors and actresses there. An unerring instinct for the American equivalent of his European haunts had led him to Schwabs'. And Skolsky is very proud of the fact that the *Café du Dôme*, the *Rotonde* and the Schwabadero all smell alike to the keenest nose.

Rival drug companies attribute a large part of the Schwabadero's success to the publicity Skolsky has given it. A syndicate approached him once and offered him money to hang out at another drugstore, in which they were interested. The owner of a chain of drugstores asked him to go on the air for them. He refused both offers.

Skolsky conducts all his business at Schwabs' and uses it as his mailing address. He takes his phone calls there too. Among the medicine bottles in the rear of the store, a small space is reserved for his correspondence and other papers. The Schwabs send his copy down to the newspaper office for him every night. From there it is distributed all over the country.

Despite the fact that Schwabs' has been going ahead for fourteen

years at an ever accelerating pace, the brothers still seem fearful that they'll wake up one morning and find their source of livelihood vanished like a hashish dream. Before the city authorities banned pinball machines, the Schwabadero housed two of those contraptions, complete with lights flashing on and off, bells ringing and all. A nightly feature of the "floor show" was pinball tournaments, with clagues cheering the contestants. "When the pinballs were ruled out, the Schwabs worried themselves sick brooding over the possibility that the place would fall apart," said Skolsky.

"I wish we could sell twice as many postage stamps as we do, and we sell plenty," said Jack moodily. "It brings that many more people into the store." That kind of thinking is perhaps the most significant reason why the Schwabadero continues to roll merrily along.

6. *"When He Looks at Me, I Wonder
if My Soul's Showing"*

To say that nothing is so dead as yesterday's newspaper is a truism so overworked it has become a cliché but an equally strong case could be made for the rigor mortis that seizes upon yesterday's King of Swoon. It startled me, therefore to learn that the greatest movie matinee idol of them all was still alive and kicking—not at the blows fate had dealt him below the belt but in sheer exuberance—and that he was enjoying life.

Time was when he rolled along the streets in the largest automobile in the world, a custom-built Marmon, guaranteed to do 110 miles an hour. All the metal parts of the car that the public could see were gold-plated. Appropriately, it was painted royal purple and his name, FRANCIS X. BUSHMAN, was lettered on it in gold. The makers of the gas-sweating behemoth had paid him \$2,000 to decorate it in such gaudy fashion, hoping thereby to focus public attention upon their masterpiece.

Five Great Danes followed him wherever he went—he had three hundred of them on his 280-acre estate, Bushmanor, outside Baltimore. When he entered a store, crowds pushed right through plate glass windows to be near him and ended up in the windows themselves, peering at his brow and the tip of his nose. His classic profile threw grown women (not teensters) into conniption fits. Once he was in a store, salesgirls neglected their counters and shoplifters had a field day.

In self-defense, merchants begged him not to visit their places of business and offered to send anything he wanted to his hotel, if he would only stay away. Bits of his clothing became treasured souvenirs, and the apparel-collection mania attached itself to those who were foolhardy enough to venture forth with him. Once Mary Pickford accompanied him to Boston, and the populace almost left her looking like September Morn. He collected amethysts and wore rings set with stones as big as walnuts. His chauffeur and his household staff wore lavender livery, and the monogrammed cigarettes he smoked were lavender too.

In 1915, a national poll elected him King of the Movies, and he was crowned at both the San Diego and the San Francisco expositions. At the peak of his amazing vogue, he employed eighteen secretaries to answer the letters lovesick women wrote to him. A much thinner and younger Louella Parsons was head of his secretarial force, and so uncomplex was the movie industry then that she was also script writer and story editor for the film company employing him.

He took whole movie companies to spend week ends at Bushmanor. He made the first extensive personal-appearance tour and starred in 424 pictures—more than any other actor, living or dead. Even he doesn't know how much money he made, but he remembers that he piled up more than \$6,000,000 in five years. It has been estimated that, in all, he earned \$10,000,000—a figure which would make him perilously close to being the screen's No. 1 all-time money-maker. But as fabulous as was his monetary take, he was constantly in and out of debt. When he married for the second time, he was on the cuff for \$136,000.

When he faced a motion-picture camera, he was the only really big male star. He preceded Wally Reid by four years, and Valentino by ten. No one since has stood out so soaringly above the competition.

President Taft once told him, "All the people love you, but I can't have the love of even half the people." The columnist, Arthur

Brisbane, said of him, "His is the best-known name and face in the world."

Then, overnight, his glittering house of celluloid cards tumbled. In 1918 he sued his wife for divorce in order to marry his leading lady, Beverly Bayne. His admirers hadn't known that he was married. It was written into his contract that he must keep the fact a secret from them. Hearing about it, they felt that he had been unfaithful to them. Even worse, the divorce brought out the fact that he had five children. That, they could not forgive. The worshippers who had mobbed him were even more frenzied in their rush to desert him. Within two weeks, one secretary was able to handle the few tear-stained letters still trickling in.

Francis X. Bushman appeared in one more really big movie, *Ben Hur*. But Ramon Novarro was the hero of the film, and Bushman, profile and all, played the heavy, a Roman villain named Messala. After that, he toured in vaudeville with Beverly Bayne. Presently he vanished. The abyss—and there is none deeper—into which the movie great fell, once they begin to slide, swallowed him. Then the 1929 stock-market crash cuffed the screen's most outstanding Humpty-Dumpty around still more.

Snugly wrapped in flowering green vines, the current reincarnation of fabled Bushmanor is extremely modest. Five cages of canaries have taken the place of the five great Danes. Instead of irate husbands clamoring for revenge because of his remote-control effect upon their wives, clucking chickens and 100 homing pigeons inhabit its back yard. But as small as the house is, it seems even smaller because of the booming presence in it of the man President Taft envied. His exuberance crowds it. His jowls are heavier than they were in nickelodeon days, encroaching flesh has blurred the collar-ad profile, but Bushman at sixty is still handsome.

In his front room I sat and looked at an oil painting of a Roman chariot race on the wall. "There are lots of mistakes in that painting," Bushman told me. "I have done more chariot racing than any man alive—I drove past the camera forty times in *Ben Hur*—and I ought to know. *Ben Hur* was a great joke on Mussolini.

When we went to Italy to shoot the picture, he was most hospitable. He thought we were about to recreate the grandeur that was Rome. He couldn't do too much for us. Then, when we were done and had gone home, and he saw the film, he almost had a stroke. The hero was a young Jewish follower of Christ, and a Roman was the villain of the picture.”

I pulled out a notebook and thought of questions with which to start the conversation rolling. With the ease of a veteran pro-footballer nudging a pigskin from a rookie's grasp, Bushman took the interview firmly out of my hands.

“In my time,” he began, “I have probably been the most-interviewed man in the United States. The first writer who came to write about me did it thirty years ago. All the interviews I've ever had were all alike. I want to call my own shots this time. I'll give it to you the way I think it ought to be.”

I let my questions wait. I didn't have much choice. Bushman's stentorian tones pushed at the walls. “There's a little thing by Longfellow that seems to fit me,” he said. “‘Life hath become to me an empty theater—its lights extinguished, the music silent and the actors gone; and I alone sit musing on the scenes that once have been.’” It wasn't a happy thought, but he didn't seem depressed by it. The words rolled in his mouth like fine old brandy.

He had made some notes of his own on a sheet of brown paper, and referred to them from time to time. “I'll give you what I've typed here when I'm through,” he told me. “You won't need your notebook.” Meekly I put it away.

“I was born in Baltimore,” he said. “My parents saw to it that I lacked nothing. It was my father's wish that I be a doctor. My mother wanted me to be a priest. But most of all, she wanted me to be great. At the top. She had a Washington Monument complex about me. It must have affected me prenatally, for I, too, wanted to excel in everything I did. Before I was twelve, I'd read all the classics in my father's library. Once I ran away to join a circus. A storm blew down a tent. Canvas covered us while horses and elephants ran wild. My family was sure one of the elephants must

have stepped on my head. Certainly, they thought, some tragic accident must have befallen me to make me decide to become, of all things, an actor."

The one-way interview gathered momentum. "I thought a sound body was important in anything a man planned to do. I took up boxing, wrestling, bike racing, distance running, weight lifting. I worked at those things so intensively that I had a nervous breakdown at seventeen. There was a Frank Merriwell influence working on me. A Bernarr Macfadden influence, too, I suppose.

"There was family opposition to the theater"—Bushman pronounced it "thitt-tuh," as any self-respecting trouper of the early 1900's does—"I used to sneak out to work on the stage as a super when a play came to town. I picked up thirty-seven such jobs in two years. There were tours on the road and stretches in stock. I learned all the lines of all the shows I suped in. I was ready to go on in any part if they needed me. Always there was struggle, struggle struggle. I had married at eighteen. There were children to feed and clothe."

The Bushman voice lifted itself several decibels. He stood up and paced up and down. That morning I had felt very fit and comparatively young, but his gusto made me feel like a tired and feeble old man. "Then came pictures," he continued. "I had posed for lantern slides—the kind they used to flash on the screen while a baritone with a waterfall hair-do sang Mother Machree. I had also posed for sculptors, and a talent scout who saw one of those statues traced it back to me and persuaded me to try motion pictures. Once in pictures, I was on the Main Line. A streamliner. I raced always with wild abandon. There were thrills, hills, curves, ecstasy. It was glorious. When I went abroad I had my own private deck, my own steward. But there was no peace overseas for me. I was like the American flag. I reminded people of home, and they flocked to my suites in Paris and in Rome just as they had in Chicago. Yet the other day an elderly woman came up to me and said, shading her eyes, 'Aren't you Douglas X. Bushman?' Fame is fleeting."

He made a sweeping gesture with his hand. "Then someone threw the switch. There was divorce and tragedy, followed by the denunciation of the public. I was unknown and on a side road, long and treacherous, picking my way through villages and hamlets. A genuine Via Dolorosa. Once a man like myself begins to slip, there are kicks, bludgeons, blows. Then, after ages, back once more for a short dash on the Main Line in Ben Hur. Again a thrown switch, and I was again an outsider. My head was bowed. Icarus had been twice struck down, but he was not defeated. Give me two pin feathers, and I could fly. Studio doors were closed to me, but not the radio. Came success in radio. Then, after years of absence, a big picture. Wilson. Vast studios. Figures passed me in the semi-gloom. Whispers, 'Know who that is? That's Francis X. Bushman.' Glances were thrown my way. Some contemptuous. Some pitying. I played just a bit part—they left my big scene on the cutting-room floor—and I haven't had a call from a studio since, but they were the ones to be pitied. I had reached heights they would never attain to or know."

It dawned on me that I was being given, gratis, the kind of show that money can't buy any more. Actors of the modern, restrained, understatement school didn't go in for bravura and pulling out all the stops. But the Bushman performance had me. It was a vintage *tour de force*. Almost I felt like applauding—not ironically, but honest, palm-tingling applause.

I was on the edge of my chair. The voice was full-bodied and resonant. He was working up to a third-act curtain for an audience of two—his wife and myself.

"It was the triumph of the ideal. Perfection in every department—story, subject, direction. Each set was a masterpiece. I was awed by their beauty, and understood what toil and pride had gone into them. Most men die before their dreams are realized. I had been permitted to stay and relive and rethrill what can be and has been done in the realm of make-believe. And I thought, *I am a block in this mosaic. Perhaps, if it hadn't been for me, the mosaic might have had a flaw.*"

I drew a deep breath and brought out my notebook again. One of the things I wanted to hear him do was to compare the old days of movie making with the new.

"In Wilson," he said, "a light went on when the camera was ready to roll, and God help you if you made a noise. One cough and everything stopped. People glared. The director shouted, 'Who did that?' In the old days, there were as many as seven companies working on the same set. I might be having a death scene in which I knelt heartbroken beside my little daughter whose life was flickering out, while next to me they would be shooting a noisy comedy. Cameramen would be yelling—there was no sound track to pick it up—and directors barked through megaphones. I had come from the thitt-tuh where all was silence and respect when an artist was engaged in his art, where even the stagehands wore sneakers and spoke in whispers, and I said I couldn't stand the racket of this new medium. Now there were chalked lines drawn, giving me a space of only four feet in which to act, and I was constantly wandering off the set and disappearing where the cameras couldn't pick me up. Almost everybody doubled or tripled in brass to help out. We didn't sit around between shots. We pulled this or moved that. I remember a stunt man who told me, 'I get twenty-two dollars a week, and they've broken twenty-two of my bones. That's a dollar a bone.'"

Essanay, the company that had Bushman under contract, used to pay ten or fifteen dollars each for stories. If a man could sell them as many as three stories, he was called in and asked to be a director, and was paid as much as fifty dollars a week. He might not know anything about making a movie, but if he could remember not to shoot more than 2000 feet of film each time, he was tops.

A movie set was lit by Cooper-Hewitt arcs. Later on, kliegs. "We just turned on all the juice we had, and let it go at that," Bushman said. "The heat was terrific. When you got klieg eyes, the pain went into your brain. I remember one night it was so bad I was mad with it, stark, raving mad. I tore the room to bits."

Doubt gripped the industry when Ben Hur was made as an eight-reeler. Exhibitors refused to have anything to do with such a

monstrosity. "All we run is three and a half reels," they said. "We've got to get the people in here and out again fast. We can't charge them more than ten cents. If we charge them fifteen, they'll stay away." It was cut to six reels, then to four.

I asked about the difference between the technique of acting and makeup of the World War period and today.

"I used to come into the studio already made up," Bushman said. "I always made myself up. I made my own beards and sideburns too. When they called me to play Baruch in Wilson, I studied photographs of him and did the make-up before I left home. When I arrived on the lot they took one look at me and said, 'You've got to take that off.' I said to them, 'What's the matter with it? I used it in 1925 for George Washington, and it was all right then.' They paid no attention to me. I was sent over to a make-up man, who slapped on a little grease paint and parted my hair." Bushman grinned. "Would you believe it, it was fine. He had done a good job.

"In the old days we acted with a capital *A*. We had to let people all over the world know what we meant when we shook a fist or smiled or breathed deeply. The pantomime we used was the *Esperanto* of the times. These days, actors laze through a part. The tempo is slowed down. I couldn't believe they were getting away with it. The way we used to act, they call 'hammy.' The director would ask me, 'Bush, what are you going to do in this scene?' and I'd tell him. Now they say, 'Take it easy, Frank.' They're right. A man has to adapt himself to the times."

Bushman's principal financial support now comes from an appearance in radio. Now with the National Broadcasting Company he plays dramatic roles in *The Rexall Summer Theater* on Sundays and reminisces about Hollywood in a music and variety show called *The Time The Place And The Tune* on Thursday evenings.

There is no mile-long auto now. Bushman has made a deal with a neighbor to drive him to the broadcasting studio for a small consideration.

Bushman thinks the finest compliment the radio half hour has had was when a taxi driver told him, "I don't like it; it's too ethical."

He went with me to the door with his amiable wife—he married in 1936 and calls her Mike—"I have no regrets. I loved every minute of it," he said. "If I had to do the same thing over, I'd do it the same way. I spent it as fast as it came. When you have the capacity for enjoyment, that's the time to enjoy life. As you get older you begin to think before you enjoy, and that spoils everything. Some of the old-timers, people with whom I worked, are still living in the past. When you meet them on the street they pull out old, tattered pictures of themselves in this role and that role to show to you. You can write it down that Bushman is living right now, and in tomorrow—even if some of those who used to think I was tremendous aren't.

"The other night I went down to Los Angeles to a theater that shows old films. I sat there watching Earle Williams rolling his eyes. I watched the girls' bosoms heaving. When my face flashed on the screen, I laughed so hard I cried. I said to Mike, 'Look at that. I'm putting all my emotions in my jaw.' An elderly woman next to me asked me sternly to keep quiet. I was spoiling it for her. 'They aren't going to laugh at him while I can help it,' she said."

Listening to him, I knew how that woman felt. I didn't want anybody to laugh at him either. Even himself. I wasn't an elderly woman, but I could remember saving up pennies to see him make love to Beverly Bayne, and it had rocked me right down to the soles of my Boy Scout shoes.

Alterations have been made in the pattern of male matinee idols since Frank Bushman defrosted women's pent-up emotions. The leonine head, the booming tones thundering from an out-thrust chest, the business of playing a scene with such extravagant pantomime that even a Hottentot could understand it, all these have given place to histrionic subtlety and to stars who are tall, dark, and handsome, rather than statues chiseled from concrete blocks.

But the suddenness of their advent has not changed. They still

arrive overnight. One minute they are nowhere. The next, their name in lights starts queues to forming outside theaters.

Since the day Dustin Farnum fluttered hearts under corset-covers, "great profiles" have popped up in the film metropolis with a roar like Vesuvius erupting. Gregory Peck's arrival was in the best clap-of-thunder, bolt-of-technicolored-lightning tradition.

The public has been taught to think of Hollywood as a place where studio executives toss money around as casually as urchins playing with beanbags. The truth is that, when it comes to getting a studio its money's worth, movie executives are as canny as Yankee peddlers. With Peck's advent, however, they trampled one another underfoot in their eagerness to lay out money for the services of a youngster most of them had never seen, even fleetingly, in a screen test. It was a 1944 Klondike gold rush. It was keeping up with the Joneses on a hundred-grand scale. "It was," as one participant put it, "murder." Another described it, "The news that there was somebody tall, dark and handsome, *who could also act*, on the other side of the mountains, seemed to get around by native tom-tom."

Suddenly, people previously regarded as sane were scrambling and snarling and begging for a piece of a young man who had made only one movie, *Days of Glory*, and that one hadn't been released, and nobody had seen it. He had been in three New York plays that were strictly morning-glories with an average run of about four weeks each. All anybody knew was that he, personally, had emerged from those flops with good notices.

Before the bidding and the finagling and the uproar had simmered down, parts of Peck belonged to four different studios, and his name was signed to contracts obligating him to eight years of celluloid servitude. He had turned down opportunities to make twenty movies and was committed to make fourteen others. Two of his first three starring roles, *The Keys of the Kingdom*, *The Valley of Decision* and *Spellbound*, were played opposite the tops in feminine acting talent—Ingrid Bergman and Greer Garson. And all this had happened to him before the public had seen a single foot of film in which his profile—a cross between a young, beardless

Lincoln and the Gary Cooper of *A Farewell to Arms*—appeared.

One movie writer put it, "This time Hollywood, rather than the paying customers, can take credit for recognizing a gold mine when they saw the same." The emergence of Peck was even more miraculous than that. Hollywood had recognized a gold mine without having seen it at all.

By all the yardsticks (save one) used to measure a star's candle-power, Peck possessed phenomenal incandescence from the very start. The tip-offs are first, fan mail; second, publicity acceptance (how much lineage and how many pictures the newspapers and fan mags will go for); third, the demand of the studios for a star's services. The fourth measuring device is box-office appeal.

Even at a time when only one major film in which he appeared, *The Keys of the Kingdom*, was playing to the public, his fan mail already averaged 3000 letters a week, and every fan publication had featured him either on its cover, with a special article about him, or both. He was selected "the best hope for 1945" by a fan-magazine poll, and one fan-mag writer did a piece telling women exactly how it felt to be Mrs. Greg Peck.

Perhaps the best place to begin Peck's story is with a phone call received by his agent, Leland Hayward. When Hayward describes that call, he doesn't sit still. He leaps from his chair and strides up and down his office, emitting a freshet of words. Hayward is president of Southwest Airways. He godfathered a training flying school that trained boys from twenty-nine countries for wartime aviation. It was the only school in America to train Chinese pilots. He is the man behind the stage hit, *A Bell for Adano*. He is, and was, one of the best known and most successful authors' and actors' agents. But nothing like that call ever happened to him before. Hayward has been around Hollywood a long time, and is not give to hysteria. His account of the Peck stampede, therefore, is all the more impressive.

The voice on the New York end of the wire belonged to Casey Robinson, a motion-picture writer who wanted to become a motion-picture producer. He was still working for Warner Brothers, but

was just about to sever his connection with that studio. "You handle a boy named Peck," stated Robinson.

"Do I?" Hayward asked.

"You do," Robinson said. "I've just seen him in a show, and he's good. Hal Willis is going to call you, too, to try to sign him for Warner Brothers, but I'm first. I want Peck exclusive."

"I didn't know what Casey was talking about," Hayward said. "I'd never heard of Peck. So I stalled. 'Of course, he'll want time off to appear in an occasional stage play,' I suggested."

That didn't faze Robinson, so Hayward took a deep breath, said, "He won't make tests, either," and waited for the outraged howls. But Robinson took that one in his stride too. Hayward began to mention things that were ordinarily like flapping red flags in a producer's face. "He must have approval of the first two or three pictures he does. . . . You can't sign him for more than three years. . . . He must get a thousand a week for his first picture, fifteen hundred for his second and two thousand for his third." He sat back and waited for the wires to melt as they carried Robinson's reply westward. But Robinson merely said "Okay," and hung up.

The phone rang again. This time it was Hal Wallis. Hayward went through his list of Peck-won't-do-this-and-Peck-won't-do-that again. They bothered Wallis no more than they had Robinson. Bill Goetz, then with Twentieth Century-Fox, phoned, and once more Hayward went through his Peck-is-hard-to-get routine. "Goetz wondered if I was nuts or something," Hayward said. "'We don't sign actors to terms like that in these times,' he told me." But he capitulated too. Then Paramount called, and RKO. David Selznick had tested Greg in New York and had passed him up, but when the Peck fever seized him, he called Hayward and said, "The kid was very young then—I want him back again."

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was also putting the heat on Hayward for a slice of the Peck cake, but Peck wasn't sold on any of the stories suggested for him by either Metro or Warner's, although the brothers Warner offered him Bette Davis as costar for the first two pictures he would make for them. "As a matter of fact," said Hayward,

"one of the biggest feuds in years developed between me and Metro, particularly between myself and L. B. Mayer, because they weren't able to sign Peck then and there. Time and the fact that they eventually got Peck for some pictures more or less healed the breach, although you cannot even now call it a passionate love affair."

Peck wanted to work with Robinson because Robinson had told him he was forming a small, intimate company, that Peck would be part of the company, and it sounded to Peck "kind of like an art venture." Coming from the theater, he was used to thinking in those terms. Robinson wound up by working for Metro and sold the pictures he had Greg under contract to do to Metro, which washed out the art-venture angle neatly. Before signing with Metro, Robinson had split his contract with Peck and had given half of it to RKO.

In desperation, Hayward took a plane to New York to see his mystery man in person. When Hayward told him, "I'll take you to the Coast and let you look them all over," the promise was symptomatic of the amazing way things were working out. Ordinarily he would have said, "I'll take you to the Coast and let them look you over."

Peck had a verbal agreement with Max Reinhardt to do an Irwin Shaw play. "Hayward thought I was nuts to do it," Greg said. "I think he would have liked it if I had gone into hiding somewhere—maybe in the desert—until he was ready to unveil me for the studios. If I had laid an egg in that Reinhardt show, it could have switched me off like a light, but as it was, things worked out all right."

When Hayward arrived back on the Coast, MGM had decided to inject itself into the Peck bidding contest, and David Selznick had wanted to sign him for fifteen years.

Nutty things kept right on happening. Hayward called Charles Koerner, head of RKO, and said, "Look, our boy Greg has had lots of expenses, and we ought to have a bonus for him." Without blinking an eye Koerner said, "How will five thousand do?" Joe Mankiewicz, who was scheduled to co-author and produce *The*

Keys of the Kingdom at Twentieth Century, told Hayward bitterly, "Zanuck says I've got to make a picture starring an unknown. He must be bats!" When Mankiewicz met Greg his doubts lap dissolved into enthusiasm. Meeting Peck, David Selznick, a fairly tough individual, decided to make four pictures with him: *Duel in the Sun*, *The Yearling*, *The Razor's Edge* and *The Robe*—a quartet of the juiciest parts a young actor could wish for.

During the latter part of the Bring-Peck-Back-Alive campaign, *Days of Glory*—the picture Greg had made a year or more before—was released. It set no Rialtos aflame, but the Peck stock was coming upward so fast the film's nonhit qualities changed things not at all.

The business of being changed overnight into a prize package for talent hoarders failed to send Greg into a tailspin. He attributes much of the excitement about him to the fact that so many men had left the stage to go to war it created a theatrical manpower vacuum, and a spinal injury, which kept him out of the Army, made it possible for him to help fill that empty space. Then, too, a lot of other things were too fresh in his mind for him to take his vogue "big."

Gregory Peck was born in La Jolla, California, twenty-eight years ago. His father—a druggist—had wanted his son to be a doctor. Following out this parental ambition, Greg took a pre-med course at San Diego State Teacher's College, but after a period of exposure to it he began to think, *A man oughtn't to be a doctor unless the urge is so strong inside of him he can't help being one.* The urge wasn't that strong in Peck, so he quit college and took a job with an oil company as night watchman and utility delivery man.

One day the assistant manager called him in and said, "You're doing fine. You've got a future with this company. In ten or fifteen years maybe you'll have a job like mine that will pay you as much as three hundred dollars a month."

"He talked me right out of that job," said Peck. "It was like having a big rock dropped on my head and cracking it open to let in the light. I was going to get further than he'd gotten in ten

or fifteen years or break a G-string trying, so I went back to college."

He entered the University of California at Berkeley and lowered his long 170 pounds into a racing shell. In the Poughkeepsie regatta of 1937, he was alternate for the No. 2 spot in the Golden Bear shell, but since nothing of Dick Merriwell fiction in the shape of a broken arm happened to the first choice for the No. 2 spot, Peck didn't get into the race. During the season of '39, a spinal injury ended crew for him. "I must have done something wrong," he said. "Probably I strained myself because I didn't warm up properly. I can still ride horses, but I can't pick up a suitcase, and leaning over backward and bowling are bad."

Once his back had taken the count, he went out for college theatricals and made the cast of *Moby Dick*, a one-act play. After graduation he lit out for New York, where he wangled a job in the amusement sector of the World's Fair, and perched on a platform in front of an attraction called the Meteor Speedway, as a "talker."

He used his one day off a week to look for a better job, and six weeks later found one, guiding sight-seers through Radio City. He was paid \$1.50 a tour and his average take was forty dollars a week. His new job ended in November when the visiting crowds thinned. By that time he was going to dramatic school by day and guiding trippers at night. As a result he was often short of sleep.

Once he shepherded a crowd of sight-seers into the Radio City theater and suggested that they take a ten-minute breather. The tourists weren't the only ones who took a breather. Peck's own breathing sounded like a snore. Thirty minutes later applause woke him. He loaded his group into an elevator, shot them to the seventieth floor and groggily pointing out Brooklyn, identified it as New Jersey.

When the guiding job folded, he concentrated on dramatics at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theater. If those who ran the school thought a youngster showed promise, they staked him or her to a scholarship which included fifty dollars a month for living expenses. The Playhouse carried Peck for two years.

Sometimes he blew the whole fifty in one week. He couldn't seem to learn *not* to take a girl out and buy her a three-dollar dinner and treat her to a show. Occasionally he picked up a modeling job. He did three weeks' work for a mail-order catalogue, posing in long-handled underwear, in pajamas and wearing a variety of hats. He was paid a couple of hundred dollars for it. In the summertime he did such things as playing stock in the Barter Theater in Virginia, a place run on a chicken-or-ham-or-a-hatful-of-eggs-for-a-pair-of-tickets basis.

Peck's final performance at the Neighborhood Playhouse was covered by a number of Broadway talent scouts. After it was over, producer Guthrie McClintic offered him a job touring with a Katharine Cornell road company in a revival of *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Peck had eight lines to say in the third act. He was paid fifty dollars weekly, or \$6.25 a line, but much more important to him was the opportunity to meet tiny, candy-haired Greta Konen, Miss Cornell's make-up expert, hairdresser and researcher.

In the summer of 1942, Peck worked in a theater at Cape Cod. In mid-July, McClintic summoned him back to New York to rehearse the lead for a new play, *Morning Star*. The show opened in Philadelphia on September eighth, and Peck received about as bad a set of notices from the critics as it is possible for an actor to get.

He wasn't married to Greta then, but he put in an SOS for her, she hurried to Philadelphia and they went to work. They went over that play, line by line. Greta played all the other parts while Peck concentrated on his own. "Until then, I stunk," he said. "But by the time we got to New York, I was sure of myself, and I got good notices." The play ran for a month. The day after it folded, Greg Peck and Greta Konen were married. He had proposed to her in San Francisco on December eighth of the preceding year, during the country's first blackout. The tension-laden darkness of that night did nothing to hurt his romance.

They decided at that time that they were too poor to be married. Ten months later, Greg's weekly salary—when he was working—

was only a hundred a week. "But money or no money, comes a time when you can't wait another twenty-four hours," he said. "We picked up a couple of friends and went to a church at Sixty-third Street. We were married in the men's lounge—the men's room opened from it—and all through the ceremony people came hurrying in, ducked through a door and after an interval reappeared. I guess we were the only couple who were ever married practically in the men's room of a church."

Greg and Greta set up housekeeping in a capsule walk-up apartment. It set them back fourteen dollars a week, it had a private bath, and they shared the kitchen with another tenant.

After *Morning Star*, Peck played the juvenile lead opposite Jane Cowl in *Punch and Juliette*—it never got to New York—the male lead opposite Martha Scott in *The Willow and I*, and opposite Geraldine Fitzgerald in *Sons and Soldiers*. None was a success financially, but each was a *succès d'estime* for Greg. By an ironic freak of fate, the fact that these vehicles were short-lived was a break for him. If any of them had been a hit, he might still be in New York.

Judged by Hollywood standards, the Pecks' California social life is so unpretentious as to seem almost a form of exhibitionism. Greg's idea of a binge is to have a few friends in for poker or to pack a lunch and go on a picnic with Greta.

Greta is not worried about the possibility that her husband may "go Hollywood." He wears the same suit for a month. He is not one for hand-painted cravats with sunburst overtones. In fact he is not one for cravats. When Greg was invited to a party by a famed Hollywood hostess, he took it for granted that Greta was invited too. The hostess made it plain that she didn't need wives for the party, what she needed was *men*. The party got along without Peck.

Peck is not one to whom conversation is a form of indoor athletics. He pauses frequently between sentences to think out what he's going to say next. His voice rubs against the eardrums gently.

Because he is relaxed himself, listening to him is a relaxing experience.

Paradoxically, he thinks of himself as being exceptionally nervous and high-strung. "I take my work very seriously," he said. "Sometimes I'm set to stew about it all night, but Greta has a way of making me see the foolishness of that kind of mental rat race, and keeps me from beating my brains out."

The Peck personality is a silky fabric of high tensile strength. If personalities had colors, his would be warm brown, deep red and purple. It is not patterned in jagged zigzags, crazy loops and eccentric streaks. His only eccentricity is his breakfast, which invariably consists of a raw egg in sherry and a little cereal.

Greg believes that an actor's best opportunity to learn his trade is from a director with integrity, honesty and sensitiveness, and he tries to remember what his directors tell him. "I learned realism from Jacques Tourneur," he said. "From Hitchcock, I learned to work with originality. He's always inventing a new kind of screen business for you to do. With him, a love scene is not just two people grabbing at each other. He makes symbolism count."

Peck readies himself for a role with a single-minded intensity that sweeps all difficulties away. Although he had never been on skis, he was forced to learn to ski overnight for *Spellbound*.

When as a part of his role in *Duel in the Sun*, he was told, "You'll have to jump over a horse's rear end and land in the saddle while it's in full gallop," he took himself to a riding stable and rode for three solid weeks. Not content with learning to ride, he mastered roping and wore cowboy costumes from dawn till dusk to get used to the feel of levis, a close-hugging shirt, and high, cow-poke heels. The only flaw was the fact that his hips were so narrow his gun belt showed a tendency to slip down around his ankles.

Duel in the Sun marked Peck's departure from parts in which he has played a sympathetic, on-the-side-of-the-angels role. Before undertaking it, David Selznick, its producer, charted the popularity curves of Clark Gable and John Garfield and found that at that point in their career in which they played a "bad-boy" part, their

audience appeal zoomed. So in *Duel in the Sun*, Peck was a black sheep. In the end, with a bow to the Hays office edict that an absence of virtue must succumb to rectitude, Jennifer Jones killed him.

Sooner or later, anyone who has been around Hollywood becomes aware of its "horrible examples." Wistfully they hang about on the fringe of things, like superannuated barflies haunting a bar. It's not "one of the house" that they are waiting for. What they want is to throw a lip over the cup of fame once more. They are the greats of yesterday—men and women who once stood where the Garsons, the Boyers, the Gables and the Pecks now stand. Once they were "in," they told themselves they were "set." They would always be "up there." Why fret about savings accounts and buying bonds, and investing against a humpty-dumpty fall? The public was nuts for them, wasn't it? It always would be, wouldn't it?

When you talk to a young actor like Peck, the question, "What are you doing to protect yourself against a time when maybe things won't be as rosy as they are now?" is inevitably in the back of your mind. To those who like him—which means almost everyone, for despite his rocket rise, ordinarily a breeder of jealousy, all Hollywood seems to be pulling for him—Peck's answer is bound to be a disturbing one. "It seems to me, the trick is to save yourself rather than dough," he said. "I never let myself make but one picture at a time, in my mind. If you're thinking about what you're going to do in the next one, you get off the beam on the one you're working on now. I want my career to be the important thing in my life. I know a star is supposed to be good for about five years, but I'm going to last twenty. If I'm a good actor, the future will take care of itself."

I thought of those before him who had said that, only to skid downward. Then I thought of what Bergman had said about him. I thought of his 1935 jalopy, in which he drives himself to work every morning. I thought of his eagerness to arrange things so he could shuck off Hollywood for a few months each year and go back to the stage—at less money. I thought of the hostess who had wanted

him to go partying without Greta and the answer he had given her. And I stopped worrying. No one has ever started the most difficult of all steeplechases—the movie point-to-point—so far ahead of the field as he has. He has shown "early foot." There are those who think he has "staying qualities" as well.

His saving grace is that it wouldn't destroy him if he didn't stay.

It wouldn't matter a tinker's damn to him if one day he and Greta suddenly found themselves back in a New York walk-up apartment, sharing a kitchen with another tenant.

As one Hollywood cynic said with a certain sardonic reluctance, yet with a determination to be fair—"That's one boy this place won't get."

It is impossible to analyze those ingredients in an actor's personality that make sensible women swoop upon his discarded cigarette butt and hide it away with the program of their first formal dance or a faded corsage presented upon some momentous by-gone occasion.

Queried about the mysterious essence that makes a waitress ask one actor for his autograph while she delivers soup to another one cold, Peter Lawford (who shows signs of taking up with the bobby-soxers where Van Johnson left off) says, "All I know is that they call it Quality X at the studios."

No one really knows more about it than Lawford does. It is a quality than can be possessed by an actor from Brooklyn—or one who speaks with a British accent. It can emanate from a round-faced, ex-hooper—or from a wasp-waisted man who looks as if he had stepped from a clothing ad. It can extend as a kind of ectoplasm from an actor with an orderly mind who would rather be shot than be late for a dinner party—or from a man who is unbelievably vague and absent-minded.

In private life, Rex Harrison, the British actor who is best known to movie-goers for his tautly performed lead role in *Anna and the King of Siam*, is unanimously conceded to be the vaguest and most absent-minded person in Hollywood. Stories based on his vagueness are served up at almost any movie capital gathering with the hors

d'oeuvres. So are stories based on his very unvague and perfectionist approach to the roles assigned to him. For Harrison is a contradictory character. He may forget where he left his topcoat or arrive for a dinner twenty-four hours late, but before going on a sound set he polishes his lines until they shine and he delivers them with consummate skill.

Harrison apparently was born vague. But even if he hadn't been, the paradoxical career that lay ahead of him was destined to give him woolly-headedness. Early in the career, he achieved prominence in England as the kind of character to whom someone in a play inevitably says, "Reggie, you naughty boy, you're simply incorrigible!" One of his actor friends describes the parts he played as involving the balancing of a cup of tea in one hand and a duchess in the other.

When, in 1945, he came to America to do his first Yankee screen work, he was determined to undertake heavier characterizations. His roles in *Anna*, *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, and *The Foxes of Harrow* went over pretty well with American fans, who found him attractively menacing—a sort of young and handsome George Arliss. The same roles left his British fans cold. Irritably, they asked, "What's happened to his dinner jacket and black tie?" So loyal were the British to Harrison's high-comedy style that one London reviewer, in commenting upon *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, stubbornly remarked, "Harrison is doing his best to look as if he is striding a quarter-deck . . . the deck is still a drawing room to us."

Harrison's British fans were not the only ones baffled by his metamorphosis from a witty drawing-room star to the Siamese monarch, King Mongkut, and the bearded and roaring sea captain in *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*. Hollywood publicists, whose job it was to "get their teeth into" the newly signed star and "sell him to the public," looked him over and pigeonholed him as the perfect example of an American's idea of a typical English actor.

Six feet one and weighing 160 pounds, Harrison plainly exemplified the tall, spare Englishman's knack of wearing clothes casually,

and he had the easy grace of movement which announces that he has supervised his tailor's fittings with minute care.

So far, so good, the publicity workers told themselves. It ought to be easy to knock out reams of copy about the well-groomed Harrison's reactions to wearing the oversized, droopy-diaper kind of pants that he had to wear as King Mongkut. Harrison, who didn't mind the Siamese pants at all, preserved a discreet and mystified silence.

The gentlemen assigned to wrap Harrison up for the American public to take out proceeded with glee. He looked like a man who knew how to bow from the waist without looking ridiculous while doing it. This gave birth to a twist that was nothing less than inspired. "Ty Power with a broad *a*," the publicity men chortled. "Boyer with an Oxford accent . . . suave, sophisticated . . . Old World sex appeal . . . God's gift to those American women whose idea of a dreamboat is a guy who can be gay even while sitting across from them at a breakfast table reading the stock-market page."

It wasn't that easy. Harrison's personality is more complex than his surface patina indicates. The trouble with trying to blueprint the inner Harrison is that his personality has the same casually subtle and impossible-to-chart quality that illumines his acting. Even those English members of the movie colony who knew him in England look nonplused when asked to analyze him. "It is," one of them says thoughtfully, "rather a stiffish problem."

Then the eager fan-magazine writers took off into the wild pink yonder, cooing like intoxicated doves. Harrison was labeled "Sexy Rexy." After an interview with him, one fan writer tapped out, "He's just slick. If you're a bobby-soxer, he makes you want to grow up fast. If you're past forty, he makes you forget you are." Uninhibitedly, a third authoress confessed, "Under his drilling gaze I was having a difficult time keeping my wits about me, *Ye gads*, I thought, *is my soul showing?*"

Whatever else Twentieth Century-Fox had acquired, it had signed a hired man who labors hard and conscientiously at his trade. Harrison's wife, Lilli Palmer, who is herself an actress, vouches for the fact that he doesn't deliver a line until he has worked it out in his

mind and has tried it out on her at least fifty times. Between shots at the studio he walks up and down, rehearsing to himself. During such a period of concentration he once forgot an appointment with a big-shot syndicated movie writer. The Fox publicity department had knocked itself out for weeks to wangle the interview for him, and was distraught. Harrison bore the department's reproachful looks with equanimity. He remarked that in the time that would have been used up by the interview he had found out how King Mongkut ate his rice when he sat down to face a bowl of it. And that was that.

Harrison was amenable, however, to any studio demand that seemed important to him. A squadron of technical experts was employed to teach him such assorted skills as dancing, Irish dialect, and fencing for *The Foxes of Harrow*.

The expert whose job it was to teach him to be a card sharper was amazed at the speed with which his pupil became adept at manipulating pasteboards.

"It was very simple," Harrison explained to him. "I merely practiced three times as long as you told me to."

So assiduously did he do homework—practicing his half sneeze, half wheeze for his role in *Anna*, and his diabolical laughter for *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*—that their housekeeper confided to Mrs. Harrison that she thought Harrison ought to see a psychiatrist.

Harrison's vagueness has become as much of a Hollywood legend as John Barrymore's bibulousness or Mark Hellinger's generosity. Harrison's friends, actor David Niven and writer John McClain, play a game that Niven calls "catching Rex out." They have learned to spot a look in his eye which indicates that, though he is there physically, his mind has gone for a stroll. Casually, Niven or McClain will make a nonsensical statement such as "Sam Goldwyn's name is really Jack, isn't it, Rex?" and Harrison cheerily answers, "Quite right, I agree with you absolutely."

Harrison plays tennis on a court that belongs to his friend Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. Occasionally his wife is confronted by a bewildered husband who remarks that he seems to have lost a lot of trousers

somewhere. She knows just where to look for them. Sighing, she drives to the Fairbanks home. After tennis, Rex, Doug, Jr., and their athletically inclined friends retire to a steam bath Fairbanks has built near his court, and when Harrison finishes parboiling himself, he is likely to climb absent-mindedly into a pair of flannels belonging to Fairbanks. His wife has fetched home whole armloads of his trousers, as well as shirts and sweaters.

Part of Harrison’s absent-mindedness can be attributed to his nearsightedness. Shortly before his marriage he made an appointment to meet Lilli Palmer at a London restaurant after luncheon. She had lunched with friends and, since the friends had never met Harrison, they decided to wait and meet him. When he arrived, he walked past her table three times without recognizing her. Not until they were married did she discover that without his glasses, which he often forgetfully leaves in the last jacket he hangs in his closet, he is nearly blind.

When she and Harrison were married, she gave Rex a gold cigarette case. On it was engraved: “With Love.” Rex kept it six weeks before putting it away so carefully he forgot where he’d put it. She had had it insured, and when the insurance company bought a new one, she had that engraved: “Once More, With Love.” Rex kept that one six months.

The British fans who prefer Harrison as a gentleman wearing tails or week-ending at a country house to Harrison masquerading as a Siamese king or a seagoing ghost were not always so belligerently possessive about him. In fact, it was some time before they realized that he was around. For years he toured the English provinces with traveling troupes of players and appeared in dreary little plays, sometimes put on in town halls. He slept where the lodging was cheapest and ate where his pocketbook allowed him to eat. His stomach has never fully recovered from the beating administered to it by the fish-and-chips and baked-beans diet he subjected it to in theatrical boarding-houses and hole-in-the-wall hasheries during his struggling, impecunious days.

Finally he was lucky enough to be cast in a London production;

no grubby, threadbare business, but a full-fledged metropolitan effort. Next morning he rushed out to buy a paper and turned to the page that carried the theatrical review written by James Agate, one of England's leading critics. He scanned it feverishly, searching for some reference to himself; for such was Agate's reputation that to be mentioned favorably by him was an almost certain boost toward fame and riches.

Near the bottom of the column he found what he was looking for—or almost. "Last night's play was a scratch affair," Agate had written, "but it had one redeeming feature. A young man in it, whose name escapes me, seems to have a real talent for comedy."

It was the last time that Rex Harrison was confronted with such humiliating anonymity. In the British-made films *Night Train*, *Ten Days in Paris*, *The Citadel*, *Major Barbara*, *Blithe Spirit*, *A Yank in London*, and *The Notorious Gentleman*, he won a name for himself as the most talented movie star who was still restricting his picture-making activities to English studios. Stage plays starring Harrison—*French Without Tears*, *Design for Living*, *No Time for Comedy*—started long lines to queuing up in London's West End theater district.

Meanwhile American women were seeing him in those smaller movie palaces whose managers padded their bookings with British-made films. Exposed to Harrison's quizzical smile and debonair charm, the ladies grew doe-eyed and breathed deeply at the thought of him as they trundled their shopping carts through the supermarket aisles.

In importing Harrison, Twentieth Century-Fox had gambled on luring a composite Ronald Colman, Cary Grant and Leslie Howard across the Atlantic.

Fox wasn't the only studio to make overtures to Harrison. But each importuner had talked to him about seven-year contracts, and seven years seemed a frightening long time to Harrison to be exiled from his native heath. When he at last came to Hollywood he saw to it that he was cushioned against any havoc Hollywood might wreak upon him, by one of those contracts the motion-picture in-

dustry reserves only for the much sought after and the hard to get.

The contract he finally signed ran for seven years, after all, but it guaranteed him \$4000 weekly, forty weeks a year, with no options. And he might work in the United States six months each year and in England for six months.

Harrison had still another reason for his capitulation. With England caught up in a struggle to eat, clothe herself and keep herself warm, no one was confecting the gay, sophisticated screen and stage meringues in which he had established himself in popular favor there. He might have stayed at home and played dramatic or tragic parts, but if he had, British audiences might have yawned.

Rex Harrison was born in Huyton, Lancashire, on March 5, 1908, the son of William Reginald and Edith Carey Harrison. His father was on the Liverpool stock exchange. His mother came from a long line of Careys who had been Baptist missionaries in India. His grandfather was rich; he had a yacht, a shoot on a Scotch moor, and an enormous house. Harrison's father, one of seven sons, never really caught on in a business way, and his family lived in a small house.

During the 1914-18 war, when Harrison's father was with a steel firm, the family moved to Derbyshire. From ten until fourteen Rex attended school in Uppingham. He was a day boy. Day boys had little standing in the school and he was pretty much of an outsider, something like a Hindu untouchable. At fourteen he went to Liverpool College. He hated it. He was backward—he'd learned no kind of concentration as yet—but he was good at athletics. He was a left-handed bowler and played on minor county teams. That saved him from complete day-boy pariah-hood.

When he finished Liverpool College, he was supposed to go into his father's office as a clerk. But he got a chance to join the Liverpool Repertory Theater and worked there for two years, during which time he lived at home. He had done theatricals at school, playing Cat in *The Bluebird*, and Flute in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While with the repertory he was paid thirty shillings a

week. He understudied and occasionally was given tiny walk-on parts.

When he decided to go up to London to seek his fortune, the youthful Rex had no connections, but in London he talked himself into a part in the actor-proof show, Charley's Aunt. "Almost immediately I was nearly sacked," he says. "An old boy in the cast who had played in the play for thirty years made me hysterical with laughter. The only kick left in life for him was to try and 'dry up' the other actors—make them go up in their lines. He'd turn his back to the audience, take out his false teeth and put them into his hat and it was difficult not to laugh."

To a properly indoctrinated Charley's Aunt director or producer the play is sacrosanct in the same way that a Gilbert and Sullivan light opera is sacred to those who are loopy about Gilbert and Sullivan. Every bit of stage business and timing in it has been hardened by years of usage, and anyone who fiddles around with it is thought a brash iconoclast. The director of the version in which Harrison appeared didn't get angry at the gaffer who concealed his teeth in his hat, because that elderly jokester was a wizard at hiding his tricks from everyone but those he wanted to "dry up." But try as Rex would, there was no way he could hide his guffawing. The director had a serious talk with him. "Old man," he said, "you'll have to pull yourself together or go." Harrison pulled himself together.

Not long afterward he joined the Greater London players and trekked around the country playing town halls. Harrison made only three pounds a week, yet he claims that on some tours he saved more money than he does now in Hollywood. His agent's fees were ten shillings. Theatrical diggings and found cost him thirty shillings more, leaving him another twenty for clothing and incidentals such as beer or entertaining a curvy soubrette.

Harrison's friend, Robert Coote—seen in the Hollywood productions, *The Exile*, and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*—often auditioned for the same parts Harrison tried out for. When Harrison and Coote got word that a touring company was being sent out, they set forth with walking sticks, gloves and spats—looking, they thought,

very Mayfair, very Berkeley Square—and hurried around to the theatrical managers' offices to snaffle a job. En route they'd bump into each other on Coventry Street or Leicester Square. One of them would greet the other with, "Hello, old boy. Anything up?" The other would look even blanker than usual and say, "Not a thing, old boy." Then they'd duck around a corner trying to give each other the slip. Fifteen minutes later they'd run into each other in the same manager's office. When that happened, they explained their presence there by saying airily, "Odd thing, old boy. I heard about this job right after I left you."

Harrison's first glimmering of real success came with his appearance in *Man of Yesterday*, starring Leslie Banks in 1935. Then he was asked by a leading London manager to take a part in a star-studded play with A. E. Matthews, Marie Tempest and Sybil Thorndike. It was a small part, but as a result of it he was asked to come to America in *Sweet Aloes*. *Sweet Aloes* was a flop, but Rex got good notices from the New York critics.

Back home again from New York, he was offered a contract by Alexander Korda, the greatest of pre-Arthur Rank British movie moguls. Korda paid him 2500 pounds a year, which seemed a small fortune to Rex. As a part of this deal Harrison played in *French Without Tears*, *Design for Living*, and *No Time for Comedy*, and made a number of movies.

His most outstanding film part was in *The Citadel*, starring Robert Donat and Rosalind Russell. Harrison played the fee-splitting Harley Street society doctor so convincingly that his work caught the eye of more than one American producer. Following *The Citadel*, he turned down his first seven-year Hollywood contract.

From 1942 to 1944 he served with the Royal Air Force in the radar section, beginning as a pilot officer and advancing to flying officer. When he was discharged he was a flight lieutenant. During the war he married the Austrian-born Lilli Palmer.

They met in Birmingham while they were touring in different shows. Harrison was in *Design for Living* and Lilli was in *You of*

All People. The town was too small to support two touring companies at once, and the company with whom Lilli Palmer traveled resented it when Rex's company came to town. When she saw him for the first time in a restaurant, she thought, *What a long, odd-looking face*, and glared at him to let him know how she felt about his being there. The glare backfired. Harrison liked it and arranged to have himself introduced to her.

During one of Harrison's wartime leaves they found time to get married. In London marriage licenses are obtained at Caxton House, and the prospective groom couldn't bring himself to ask the way to the place. Nonchalance about love when someone else had written the lines was one thing, he discovered; being insouciant about it when it touched him personally was quite another. "If I ask anyone where Caxton House is, they'll know exactly what we're up to," he protested. Lilli Palmer asked the way.

Caxton House is a huge place and the engaged couple scurried around, getting nowhere. Lilli Palmer insisted that Rex steel himself to making a few inquiries himself. He went up to a man and asked, "Where can I find — You see, uh — Where is the best place to—uh —" The man thought he was asking for the wash-room.

"Not that," Rex said indignantly.

"Oh, you mean you want a marriage license," the man said, and Rex went off into a little room with him.

After a while he came bursting out, his face scarlet. "Darling," he said, "the thing costs two pound ten, and I've come away without my wallet." Lilli kicked through with the required sum.

The shellacking to which England was subjected by German bombers gave the Harrisons a few queasy moments. When they tried to leave the train at Torquay for their honeymoon, they were blown back into their compartment by a concussion. When they set up housekeeping in a cottage near the Denham studios, a bomb landed fifty feet from their front door, jarred their roof loose, dropped chunks of ceiling on their heads and sprayed broken glass around like confetti. They moved farther into the countryside,

only to have a stray V-2 bomb, wandering far from its target, find the bottom of their garden and shower mud and rubble on the pram in which their young son Carey—born February 8, 1944—was sleeping. He was dirty and indignant, but uninjured.

Asked to explain her husband’s screen appeal, Lilli Palmer grows as ecstatic as any fan-magazine writer, although she tries to remain objective. According to her, his eyes are wicked, knowledgeable and sophisticated. She sums the whole thing up by saying, “If you’re a woman, you know that he knows what it’s all about.”

A story Harrison’s mother told Lilli Palmer delights her. When Rex was eight years old he came home after his first play at school and rigged up a stage and curtain. His mother expected him to practice his lines. Instead, he practiced taking bows.

Harrison modeled his stage technique after that of Sir Gerald du Maurier; which means that he deliberately underplays his comedy. He knows exactly the effect he wants to achieve—that of a man coming on a stage and appearing profoundly at ease. He reaches out and plucks laughs from the audience as another man might pluck fruit from a tree. He wrings laughs from lines that a play’s author thinks are only good for titters. He appears to be throwing his lines away, but there is purpose back of his casualness. He loves to get chuckles the hard way. He has even been known to get off lines with his back to an audience. According to British actress Deborah Kerr, his timing is “so superb it hurts.”

Left to his own devices, Harrison conducts himself much like one of the gilded youths he once portrayed on the London stage. Time was when he wore a monocle, but while it was all right in London, it didn’t go over so well out of town, and he discarded it after being given the bird a few times by rude parties in provincial pubs. But this year, returning from England on the Queen Elizabeth, the passenger list carried this notation: “Mr. Rex Harrison and valet.” It was the first time in years that some of those who made the crossing had seen such a listing.

Recently, when Harrison needed a convict suit to wear in a film, the one supplied by the studio’s wardrobe department lacked a proper

gentlemanly hang, in his opinion. So he ordered it from his firm of fashionable London tailors, Leslie and Roberts. Leslie and Roberts filled the order, but their head cutter still flushes a deep eggplant purple of outraged dignity when he remembers it.

Harrison's urge to carry the heavy-character loads he did in *Anna*, *The Ghost*, and *The Foxes* has vanished. "In *Anna* I had to convince audiences that I was in love with Irene Dunne without making love to her," he says, "and as the ghost in *The Ghost* and *Mrs. Muir*, I had to make passes at Gene Tierney without touching her. I'm going back to playing characters who don't have to worry about anything—especially whether they can grab a girl."

But while Rex Harrison climbed to his place in the movie galaxy laboriously, not even Frank Bushman or Gregory Peck shot into brilliance more suddenly or flamed more dazzlingly than he-man, Burt Lancaster!

Given the assignment of catching a movie comet by the tail and finding out "what the stardust in it is made of," I chose Lancaster. He fits comet specifications as if calipered to them. Two years ago he was a grownup Manhattan East Side kid. He'd worked as an acrobat in the WPA and in circuses, in night clubs and in coffee-and-cake vaudeville. He'd shown his teeth whitely as a department store floorwalker and as a singing waiter. He'd served a stretch in the Army as a buck private and non-com, entertaining the troops. When I caught up with him, he rated \$150,000 a film, and the tongues of Hollywood's producers hung out when they weighed their chances of employing him.

I had seen him jut his truck-bumper chin in *Desert Fury*; in the tough role of the Swede in the tough movie, *The Killers*; in his tougher role in *Brute Force*. In *I Walk Alone*, his chin had continued to jut. A producer had told me, "He's a lot of man; the most I've ever seen in one chunk. . . . With the fans, he's in like a burglar."

After much private argument with him, those who control his contract had persuaded Lancaster to see me. I was waiting in my hotel room for him to show up. The catch was that he hated inter-

views and interviewers. After listening to one writer sound off pompously at a cocktail party, he stood up, said, "You're a phony," and stalked away. Lunching at New York's exclusive Colony Club with a producer and a snobbish woman writer, he rose, shook the expensive dust of the place from his feet and departed. When the producer followed him to ask why he'd left, the ex-acrobat said, "That fancy-pants dame was tolerating us."

When he arrived at my hotel room, his eyes were burning hotly. His hair looked as if it had been combed with an egg beater. His six-foot-two-inch, 183-pound frame was loosely draped in a rumpled sports jacket and slacks. His shirt was open at the throat and he wore no socks on his moccasined feet. He strode across the room, walking with the springy pantherlike stride that some good athletes have. He sat on the edge of the window seat. For a few seconds he stared at me, laced his long fingers together and kneaded them against one another. Then, brusquely, he let me have it.

"I almost didn't show up," he said, jetting the words out under obvious internal pressure. "When I was halfway here, I damn near turned around and went home." He paused a moment; his expression made it clear that he was thinking he had passed up a good hunch. Then, leaning forward, he went on, "Look, I've made up my mind that Hollywood isn't going to get me; I'm going to be one guy who won't let it rot his soul. But there I was, a minute or so ago, hurrying toward your hotel just like any other publicity lapper. I said to myself, 'Lancaster, if you've reached a place where publicity is getting that important to you, you're nothing but a high-class Hollywood male prostitute.'" He shot me a burning look. "Are you going to make me look like one of those sickening heroes of the fan-magazine interviews?" he asked.

I said I was hoping to do an honest job on him. I told him that he ought to face the fact that he was one of the hottest actors in pictures at the moment and that the ticket-buying public had a right to know something about him.

He stood up, shook his finger in my face and said sharply, "I've just been reading one of your Hollywood pieces. I know the guy

you were writing about. You didn't catch him at all. You didn't get the guy who's scared, who's unsure of himself, who's worried about what headwaiters think of him." He let his finger drop, then went back to the window seat. "You did a lousy job on that guy," he said, kneading his fingers again.

I admitted that as a character analysis it hadn't been too penetrating, but I defended it by saying that there were limits to how far a reporter could go in publicly peeping into a man's soul. I protested mildly that he was demanding reportorial perfection.

"Why not?" he said belligerently. "I try for perfection."

"I saw you in *Desert Fury*," I said. "You weren't so perfect in that."

Some of his resentment seemed to seep out of him. He panthered across the room and sat down in a chair. His voice dropped. "You're right," he admitted. "I was only about fifteen per cent perfect in that one. But in *I Walk Alone*, I think I was about eighty per cent perfect. In *The Killers*, though I came close to hitting one hundred. . . . What do you want to know about me?"

I said that I wanted to know plenty, but that I felt I needed some stimulant first, and I ordered some from room service. While at the telephone, I turned over in my mind some of the things I already knew about Lancaster. I'd been told that he didn't have an inhibition; that he did have a passion for keeping in rock-hard physical condition; that, to burn up surplus nervous energy, he has been known to do sudden handstands on a night-club table or burst into song. I'd been tipped off that between takes, while a picture was being shot, he did cartwheels and talked others into joining him in *allez-ooop* routines, and that, when he took to the road to meet the press, he had brought along a toothbrush—nothing else. Not even an extra shirt. He sleeps raw. On the coldest nights, all he uses is a sheet; no blanket. He never needs a stunt man. He does anything himself a stunt man could do for him. He doesn't own a comb—just uses his fingers.

When I had completed my phone call, we settled down to talking—first about his boyhood. It seemed to me that the best way to

examine the genesis of a Hollywood comet was to start when it began to journey through outer—non-Hollywood—space. He plowed his fingers through his hair, increasing its egg-beater dishevelment, and said he’d lived near New York’s 106th Street and 3rd Avenue, that he’d attended a series of public schools and had played stickball and stoopball with other kids in the upper East Side streets. Stickball is like baseball. In stoopball, the ball is slapped with the hand to bounce it from the fronts—or stoops—of houses. His favorite hangout had been the Union Settement House. A boy who lived near by could play basketball and go swimming there free. Burt’s dad clerked at a post office for fifty dollars a week. “Those fifty bucks took care of dad, my mother, four kids and an aunt,” he told me. “We wore cast off clothes, but we were lucky. We always had food on our table.”

When he was sixteen he was awarded a basketball scholarship to N.Y.U., and had studied physical education for a year. Those who know about such things pegged him as a coming basketball great.

The man from room service brought in a coffee tray, and I signed for it. I asked Lancaster how he’d happened to become an acrobat.

Standing up, he paced the room. “My best friend was a kid named Nick Cravat,” he said. “Nick was the terror of the neighborhood. His mother was a coat maker. She spent her life lighting candles for his soul. At eighteen he’d already had sixteen professional fights. We called him ‘Little Dempsey.’”

Lancaster said that he was telling me about Nick because Nick had been a part of his taking up acrobatics. An Australian named Curly Brent happened to be rehearsing giant swings on a bar at the Settlement. After a while he started teaching Lancaster how to do it. One night, loafing under a street light with Nick, Lancaster suggested that he come up to the Settlement and let Brent teach him some bar tricks too. The Australian taught them to do not only giant swings but kip-ups and somersaults-away. After two years, Burt and Nick became partners. They named their partnership “Lang and Cravat,” worked out an act and began to read the Bill-board. “When we thought we had the act down slick, we paid

ninety dollars for a fifth-hand jalopy and headed South," Lancaster told me.

They kept on going until they ran into a little one-ring circus. The fledgling stick actors—for bar performers are called that, as well as "baractors"—asked the man in charge of the circus if he could use them. He said, "Show me what you can do," and Lang and Cravat put on their homemade tights and did their stuff. They'd learned their art on a single bar back at the Settlement House. Circuses use a triple bar. That made them nervous, and they took more than one tooth-rattling fall. The circus man was kind. "We've already got an old bar actor," he told them. "You kids work with him. Maybe you'll learn something."

While they were learning, they drove stakes, helped raise the big top, rode in street parades and carried banners. In three months they were fair bar actors. Lang and Cravat washed their own tights and had only minor expenses, which was a break. They'd started out at three dollars a week and, though they'd been raised to five, it still didn't make them feel like throwing money around loosely.

He told me that he and Nick had stayed with the circus for thirty weeks, then joined another. While with this circus Lancaster fell in love with a fellow performer. "She was the only woman in America who could do horizontal-bar tricks," he said reminiscently. "But as far as women were concerned, it was pretty much a lost art and nobody appreciated it." Lancaster and the lady bar performer were married, but continued their separate circus acts.

In addition to Lang and Cravat's bar act, they also worked out a perch act. In a perch act, an "under-stander" supports a balancing pole twenty or thirty feet long on his shoulder, while a "top mounter" goes through gyrations at the pole's top.

The time came when Lang and Cravat hadn't been paid for eleven weeks and were desperate from hunger. Then one day in a small Alabama town, the circus was accused of clipping a rube to the tune of \$400. A posse of irate citizens appeared with shotguns, and the circus owners turned the bull elephants loose to rout the vigilantes. After rounding up its ponderous defenders, the show made

its getaway. When the circus hit Waterbury, Connecticut, Lang and Cravat left it. They worked at New York’s Luna Park for a couple of months, then with a WPA circus.

I asked Lancaster what had happened to his marriage. “It didn’t work out,” he said. “We never had any fights; we just got tired of each other. We decided kids would be a drag, so we didn’t have any. It was a good thing we didn’t, since it ended in divorce.”

Lang and Cravat quit the WPA circus and tried unsuccessfully to get vaudeville billing for their bar act. But to set up their bar rigging, it was necessary for them to bore holes in floors, and vaudeville-house owners weren’t keen about having their stages left looking like a colander. The team polished up their perch routine once more.

Burt and Nick managed to book a little time on the Poli circuit, but the pay was peanuts—fifteen dollars a date—and they were growing disgusted. Their perch was too lofty for most stages; sometimes the top mounter was hidden behind the proscenium arch and the audiences couldn’t see him at all. So they went back to their bar act.

“If I ever rate an Academy Award, it won’t mean half so much to me as the time I completed my first perfect fly-over,” Lancaster told me. “I tried it for four years, and for four years I hit the bar with my knuckles until they bled. Then I got it. . . . All the time we were trying to speed the act up. Foreign bar actors did it slow; we did ours fast. Finally we cut it down to four minutes.” He made a fist of one hand and smashed it into the other one. “It went bing . . . bing . . . like that!”

I asked him what a “fly-over” was. He tried to explain, but his explanation was too full of technicalities for me.

To get around the holes-in-the-stage difficulty, Lancaster tried to invent a bar frame that would fold up like an accordion and roll out from the wings. It was more than a year before he got it to work. Before that, every time his 183 pounds hit the rigging, it lifted up from the floor.

“Finally,” he told me, “we got a booking playing a fair at Ham-

mond, Indiana. We went over big and sat around gassing about how we would soon be playing New York's Rainbow Room and live the fat life." It didn't work out that way. Three weeks later, Lang and Cravat were playing a burlesque house in Kansas City.

"Nick kept saying, 'We can't miss,'" Lancaster went on. "But I said, 'Look, we are missing. I'm not a kid any more. I'm twenty-eight. It's time I tried something else.' I lit out for Chicago with one suit—the one I had on my back—and twenty bucks in my kick."

Listening to him, I thought: *What a carny pitchman he'd have made; what a sawdust-trail evangelist.* Even when it was most intense, his voice had a singing quality.

He landed in Chicago in November, 1941, and found a job in Marshall Field's as a floorwalker in the ladies'-lounging-apparel section. ("I drew twenty-five bucks a week and learned how to con those dames along.") When the Christmas holiday rush was over, the store put the future Hollywood tough guy to work selling ties and shirts.

Growing bored with small-figured foulards and Oxford and broadcloth shirts, he went to work for a company that supplied steam heat and refrigeration to packing plants. This was more to his taste. The company operated seventy coolers, and it was Lancaster's job to adjust all seventy of them twice a day. Each round took him two and a half hours. Pork and veal had to be kept at forty-two degrees; beef required even more chill.

While at Marshall Field's he'd met a man who now offered to introduce him to the Chicago representative of Community Concerts, Inc., a CBS subsidiary. Community Concerts, Inc., needed a personable, persuasive young man to journey about the country and fill civic leaders with an uncontrollable urge to buy culture for their communities. Lancaster put it.

In July, 1942, Lancaster went to New York to be passed upon by the head of the Community Concerts, Inc., board of directors. Before hiring Burt, he asked him, "What's with you and the Army? Are you likely to be drafted?"

Across the room from me, Lancaster leaned back in the hotel

chair and flexed his muscles. "I'd got my draft papers that very morning," he told me. "That ended my culture peddling. Four months later I was in the Army. In the meantime I worked as a singing waiter in a night box near Jersey City." An ancient Irish tenor with spavined tonsils obliged the customers with Mother Machree, and afterward Lancaster sang Ol' Man River. The master of ceremonies insisted that Lancaster work as his straight man, and it gave him his first experience "talking out loud in front of people."

When the Army claimed him, he started at Fort Riley and wound up in Special Service attached to an Army outfit whose job was working behind the lines entertaining soldiers. In June, 1943, he landed in North Africa and followed the troops into Italy.

Lancaster's Army career was tempestuous. Each time he worked himself up as high as sergeant, he was busted down to the ranks again. He had difficulty with a captain who thought his wish to take part in the Army show, Stars and Gripes, was a gold-bricking attempt. The captain punished Burt by making him a truck jockey, wrestling with a steering wheel and trying to control big rubber-doughnut tires in gluey mud. Lancaster also had trouble with a lieutenant who had had three months of college dramatics, and was sure he knew all there was to know about show business. He tried to tell Lancaster how to behave when on stage, and Lancaster told him to "climb the hell out of my hair and leave me alone." Such rhubarbs were not calculated to win him promotion and pay.

"What did you do after you came home?" I asked him.

"I was home from Italy only twenty days and was still in uniform," he replied, "when I ran into this USO girl I'd met overseas." Here he got up and began pacing again. "Her name is Norma; I'm married to her now. But at the time she was working as a comedienne for a radio producer named Ray Knight. 'I'll introduce you to this Knight,' she told me. 'Maybe he can help kick you off into civilian life once more.'"

Lancaster dropped into scenarioese. "I'm on my way up in the elevator to see him when a guy puts the mince pies on me," he told me. (By "mince pies" I discovered that he meant "big, staring

eyes.”) “I don’t like the way he’s looking at me, and I’m all ready to bust him, but I manage to get out without doing it. I’m inside of Knight’s office when the telephone rings. Knight puts me on the phone. It’s the guy I’d seen in the elevator. He’s seen me go into Knight’s office. He’s working for Irving Jacobs, a theatrical producer who’s putting on a show called *The Sound of the Hunting*. It’s due to open in a few days.

“‘You an actor?’ the guy asks. I tell him no. He wants to know if I’ve ever been in show business. ‘A couple of lines in a show overseas,’ I tell him. ‘Come on over to the Warwick Hotel,’ he says. ‘I want you to read the play.’ I go over and read some of it, and they give me the stale ‘Come-back-and-see-us-Monday’ routine. ‘Look,’ I tell them, ‘make up your minds.’ Later I discover that they say things like that because they’re afraid if they tell you they like you, you’ll double your price.”

Lancaster managed to finish getting himself through the separation center on the morning the first rehearsal was scheduled. The play ran for three weeks, then folded. But the critics said nice things about Burt’s performance. Talent scouts grew bright-eyed and bushy-tailed over him, and he received movie offers from seven different studios. He wouldn’t sign unless he was permitted to do one outside picture a year. A producer named Hal Wallis granted him that privilege. He accepted the Wallis offer.

When he arrived in Hollywood, Wallis put him into *Desert Fury*. *Desert Fury* was not the happiest of Lancaster’s efforts. Fortunately for him it stayed on the shelf for a while. Meanwhile, Wallis lent him to the late Mark Hellinger for *The Killers*. The picture made Lancaster.

For the first time there was a pause in his narrative. I considered offering him some of the coffee on the tray that room service had provided, but he was thinking about what he wanted to tell me next, and I didn’t interrupt. In the breathing spell, I remembered a couple of stories I had heard about him. As part of the program for launching his new employee, Wallis thought up a screen name for him—Stuart Chase. It was pointed out to Wallis that Stuart Chase

was also the name of a famed economist, who conceivably might be annoyed if he suddenly found himself shooting it out with a penitentiary warden on the screen or—to employ a Lancasterism—"putting his mince pies on a broad." Wallis and Hellinger tried to think up a better screen name. One morning Hellinger phoned Wallis excitedly to say, "My secretary, Myrtle, suggests that we use Burt's real name." Wallis agreed it was a good idea. "It's amazing what Hollywood brains can accomplish if they give it the works," Hellinger remarked wryly.

Hellinger had told me about his first meeting with Lancaster. "I'd been thinking of Wayne Morris for my main character, the Swede, but Warners wanted seventy-five grand for him; it was my first independent picture and I wasn't putting myself on the hook for that kind of dough. I was having luncheon with one of Hal Wallis' associates. I told him the type I was looking for. He suggested Lancaster."

Next afternoon, after luncheon, when Hellinger returned to his bungalow office, a big-handed, rumped-haired man sat waiting for him on the steps of the bungalow just across the way. Hellinger had never seen Lancaster, but he had a clear picture of the Swede in his mind. The big man matched that picture. Everything about him—the way he handled himself, his quietness—told Hellinger that his search was over. Inside his office he waited for Lancaster to begin selling himself, but he said nothing. Before Hellinger knew it, he was selling Lancaster. "I don't know whether you can act or not," he told him, "but you're right for the part physically. *The Killers* is the best script I've ever had. It'll make you a star."

"I've read it," Lancaster said. "My agent gave me a copy."

"How'd you like it?" Hellinger asked proudly.

"I guess it's all right," Lancaster told him doubtfully.

When Hellinger told me this, he said, "You know what I think? I think that all the time I was talking to him, that smart guy was playing the Swede for me. The Swede I had in my mind was big, dumb, awkward, fumbling. The day I met him, Lancaster was all

four. When you get to know him, you realize that he's anything but the last three."

I asked Lancaster now, "Were you acting the Swede for Mark when you first met him?"

Words stopped spurting out of him and he grinned. It was a grin that asked, "What do you think?"

He stood up to go, and I said, "I'd like to visit you in your home."

"I don't think I want you to come to my home," he told me bluntly. "I try to keep it apart from this movie rat race. It's a symbol to me. I won't let anybody take pictures for fan-magazine layouts there. Once I let photographers or writers in, it'll mean I've given in."

Those with whom I had discussed Lancaster had told me, "Be sure to get a load of his dad. He's seventy-three. Half the time he doesn't know what to do with himself out here. He just sits or he takes long walks. But it's amazing how he's sopped up the professional point of view. He's always asking strangers if they know what kind of business one of Burt's movies is doing in some place like Columbus, Ohio. Then he brings out a copy of *Variety* and flashes the figures on them."

Harold Hecht, Lancaster's agent and business manager, had told me of a remark the senior Lancaster had made after sitting through a rough cut of his son's second picture for Wallis, *I Walk Alone*. "The old boy said, 'Wait 'til they get the musical score on the sound track,'" Hecht had reported. "'It'll make a big difference.' You'd think he'd been in the movie business twenty years."

I walked with Lancaster to the door of my hotel room and said, "I ought to meet your wife and your father. And I'd like to talk to your sister-in-law. I hear she handles your fan mail."

"My brother died not long ago, and my sister-in-law's taking it hard," he told me. "I don't want anybody asking her questions about him. Also, my wife's expecting. She's going to have a baby any day."

I said that I thought he could count on me not to do or say any-

thing stupid. He considered it. "Maybe you wouldn't," he decided. "Make it dinner tomorrow night? I'll pick you up."

At his home—it is clean, comfortable and neat, but not fancy—Lancaster introduced me to his wife, who was supervising the pots and pans on the kitchen stove. Then I met his sister-in-law, Julia. "Why don't you talk to Julia before dinner?" he said. "You can go into the front room. I'll close the door and you two can be quiet."

Accommodatingly, Julia brought out stacks of letters and Burt Lancaster Fan Club publications. They contained the usual passionate and naïve, "You're so big and strong and wonderful" and "I'm very charming if you only knew me" sort of thing.

The meal we sat down to later was man-sized. There were steaks, several vegetables, heaping plates of hot bread. Norma and Julia Lancaster put the food on the table. We helped ourselves family style. Lancaster's father sat silently at one end of the table. I tried to engage him in conversation, but with little success. Finally I hit a subject that broke through his armor. I mentioned the current high cost of food.

After dinner, we sat around listening to Burt talk about circus and vaudeville characters he had known. On the way back to my hotel, he told me he was hoping to revive the Lang-and-Cravat bar act.

"I want to do something for Nick," he said. "I owe him plenty. When I got home from Italy flat busted he offered me the money he'd saved while in the USO. Nick and I always split down the middle. We'll still do it that way. Together we can knock down five or six grand for personal appearances. Only I guess we won't be Lang and Cravat any more. We'll have to be Burt Lancaster and Cravat now." He said it regretfully.

"When do you think you'll get around to your tour with Nick?" I asked.

He frowned. "I don't know," he said. "They got me pretty busy right now."

It was a master example of understatement. With Greg Peck and Bob Mitchum, he is one of the busiest young men in Hollywood.

Lancaster earned \$110,000 during 1947. This year his salary will top \$200,000.

When we said good-by at the hotel front door, Lancaster told me, "People outside of Hollywood don't understand how it is here. It's a battle to maintain a basic integrity; a scrap against bull and baloney. You've got to fight all the time."

Walking down the corridor to my hotel room, I wondered just how hard he was fighting it and whether or not he would win. When he first came to Hollywood, he had made no secret of his plans. He was going to make one or two pictures, sack up his gold and get out. But that had been months ago. I'd heard that not long before I talked to him, he'd gone to look over an \$83,000 house in Bel Air, with a possible purchase in view. Now, when I'd asked him when he planned to leave Hollywood, his answer was vague. He's made a lot of money, but it was squirting through his fingers pretty fast, and fast spending is a tough habit to break.

Some of the reasons for that squirting were human and kindly enough. The moment he'd got his first pay check he'd brought several members of his family out to live with him. Cronies from his circus, vaudeville and Army days are always turning up and moving in with him, wherever he happens to be living. Lancaster has snaffled small parts in some of his films for some of them. As one of Lancaster's friends put it, "Nobody ever comes to visit Burt. They come to live with him."

Such loyalty amounts to a religion with him. At a press showing in Pittsburgh, he badgered a producer to make room for four of his guests. Told it was impossible to seat them, he raised so much fuss that four extra chairs were put into the tiny projection room. The producer figured that, after so much breast beating, at least some of Pittsburgh's millionaire Mellons or Fricks would show up. He was wrong. Four ex-acrobats arrived. Lancaster cared more about their reaction to the press showing than about what the press thought.

I thought of the occasional dramatic twinges his conscience gives him when he compares his comfortable style of living with the way the unfortunate of Europe and Asia live. The night before, he'd

looked at me and had said belligerently, “Here in the U. S. A. we’ve got to think of everybody. No good us sucking up Scotch and sodas in hot spots while malnutrition gives kids in Delhi bloated bellies.”

On the other hand, I’d been told that he’d been quiet, almost shy when he first came to Hollywood, and no one had to tell me that he now does most of the talking in any conversation in which he takes part. I’d found that out myself.

I remembered what a producer cynical and wise in the ways of Hollywood had said of him. “Sooner or later the guy will begin to tell himself that he can’t keep on kicking this joint in the groin and have a yacht and a swimming pool too.”

I found myself hoping that if Burt Lancaster loses his battle, his defeat won’t be a complete rout, and that he will have a previously prepared position within him, to which he can retire to regroup his forces.

7. *Hollywood's Invisible Men*

In the movie business (as in any other sizeable enterprise) most of the cogs that make the machinery hum are invisible. The names of these cogs do not appear on lists of screen credits. None of Hollywood's gingerbread gilt rubs off on them. It's not their fancy fate to be mentioned in gossip columns as having bopped a star on the snoot in a night club after being made brave by bourbon. Yet they bleed from just as many stomach ulcer holes as do Hollywood's self-proclaimed geniuses. They worry just as much—but their worries aren't as copiously salved by the pay envelope. They are the boys in Hollywood's back room—but those in the front offices don't always bother to ask them what they'll have!

They are the sound effects men, the unit men, the prop men, the workers in legal departments. They are those who build and dress the big sets or see to it that the wigs worn have the right number of hairs in them and are curled to the right curliness. Their name is legion.

Their skills are highly specialized ones. Heads of academies of natural science and keepers of zoos may know what goes on in a giraffe's firehose throat when he feels like talking to another giraffe. Not many other people do. The fact is that since his vocal chords are so rudimentary as to be almost non-existent, when a giraffe feels garrulous, he makes no sound in his throat at all. This kind of information is obscure, but it is just the kind of erudition the motion picture sound expert must be able to trot out at the drop of a query.

One movie sound department actually put a sound into a giraffe's larynx. Roughly, it resembled the noise a zebra would make if a zebra sang tenor. When the short played the country's theaters, the studio received letters from a number of naturalists reproving it for its mistake. Now the industry's sound technicians make a point of consulting those who know about such things before taking a sound Brody.

Not only must sound-department workers jackdaw together strange bits of knowledge, but each studio keeps on hand an amazing variety of sounds printed on film. Twentieth Century-Fox has more than 6000 recorded noises in its sound stockpile, including the bellow of a crocodile and the dry rustling of porcupine quills.

Thomas T. Moulton, then head of the Twentieth Century studio sound department, was a very unhappy man. In his hand was a letter that read: "Dear Sirs: I saw one of your motion pictures the other night. Remember the scene in which the Model T Ford chugged down the street? I beg to inform you that the noise of the exhaust it made was really the exhaust of a Buick. How did that happen?"

Moulton made it his business to find out. The scene had been a silent shot, and the studio sound department had dubbed in the noise. It must have been a hot day or something, because someone in the sound library had reached for "Model T exhaust" and had come up with "Buick exhaust" instead.

When Moulton goes to the movies, he is all ears instead of all eyes. To him, mere acting is unimportant. He gets a bigger bang out of sitting in a theater listening to the good-enough-to-eat sputter of frying eggs and bacon, coming from a skillet on the screen, than the subtle artistry of Betty Grable's legs.

According to Moulton, the trend in his specialty is toward natural sounds instead of synthetic ones. "We can dub in the voice of a blond night-club thrush who can sing for the voice of one who can't, and we can dub in dialogue, but we hear from the public in a hurry if we use the sound of a reciprocating engine when the picture shows a turbine. If a plane roaring overhead in a movie is

supposed to be a Corsair or a Spitfire, the sound it makes has got to be a Corsair or a Spitfire sound. We can't use just any old airplane sound track for the job. Millions of self-appointed teen-age and sub-teen-age experts would give us the old razz-ma-tazz if we did."

A movie-goer, witnessing the pictured Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava, may tell himself knowingly, "They hired a guy to do a clop-clop routine with half coconut shells on a box to make those hoof noises." When a bullfrog croaks in a cinema pond, a seasoned fan is apt to think, "They're probably using an over-sized Halloween tick-tack to get that effect."

But along with other motion-picture technological developments, the task of producing sound effects has taken seven-league steps. The hoofbeats drumfiring down from today's screen are real ones. Moreover, they can be picked up as far as four miles away and followed by a directional microphone equipped with a pencil beam and rifle sights for accuracy. When Twentieth Century-Fox needed the noise a bullfrog makes when it dates a femme frog, a member of its sound department who had a pond in his own back yard lugged home portable sound equipment and returned the next morning with a fine, rich frog-he-would-awooing-go croak.

Lion roars are no longer made by resined string pulled through a hole in the bottom of a wooden cylinder. When Twentieth Century-Fox wanted the growling of lion cubs at play, it sent a sound crew to a lion farm, where the real things romped, rolled and bit one another with playful enthusiasm. The crew found it was wasting valuable hours waiting for the right cub hubbub to happen, so a bright operator temporarily removed the lion mother from her young. The resultant chorus of resentment hit the sound jack pot. Said one sound man, "You could almost hear those cubs yelp, 'You can't do that to us.'"

Moulton can remember back to a time when sound-tracking the boom of thunder meant that someone took a thunder sheet—a big square of tin with a handle—and shook it like crazy while some-

body else whanged away at a drum, and a third sound magician arced sparks all over to double for lightning.

The thunder problem has been solved for Twentieth Century-Fox—and for anybody else with the price of a clap of thunder in his pocketbook. The solution was sheer accident. One of the studio's sound men happened to be in an Arizona canyon working on a production calling for no storm whatsoever, when one blew up out of nowhere. "We seldom have thunder here in California," said Moulton, "and when we do, it's apt to be weak in the knees and not too good. But in Arizona it rolls up and down canyons like Rip van Winkle's bowling balls. Before our man could stop his camera he had picked up about seventeen seconds of the finest thunder you ever heard. We have sold that bit of sound track between four and five hundred times. The charge is twenty-five dollars a rumble, but we throw in the accompanying reverberations—both loud and soft—for free."

While that particular thunder was pure happenstance, many hard-to-get noises packed away in the Moulton sound library are there because of deliberate planning. "When our prewar sound crews were out on location, and some of them trekked all over the world," said Moulton, "prizes were awarded to those who brought back exceptional noises. In this way, we were able to hive together such sounds as bull elephants in mortal combat, typhoons at sea, and the desert simoon. We even have the peep-peep made by the tickbird that rides cozily along on the backs of elephants when they aren't fighting, regaling themselves with lice and ticks plucked from their hides."

Not only do sound departments strive for naturalness in their product but they must keep up with the times. Formerly, when the sound of a man sending a telegram was shown, it was accompanied by the clack of a manually operated telegraph key. Keys are now definitely old hat, and the Twentieth Century sound department has strips of film on which the sound of a modern telegraph typewriter clatters and zings.

From time to time, Twentieth Century's sound technicians made

efforts to trap the sound an elevated train makes while rushing along its steel trestle. "But the real elevated-train sounds were always gummed up by other noises until they were sonic mud," Moulton said. "The best elevated sound we had was made by using a metal disk with notches filed into it, over which roller skates rolled as a hand crank was turned. This gave the click of elevated wheels on rail joints. The roar of wheels came from other roller skates moving over a wooden drum eighteen inches in diameter. The two sounds combined were usable, but not perfect."

Not long ago, the studio's search for the real thing was rewarded. A crew of sound technicians were sent to New York and arrangements were made to rent a part of an elevated train for a few hours and to shuttle it in and out of an L station on a deserted spur of track. The shuttling was done in the early-morning hours when other city noises were at a minimum.

Sounds of guns, cannons and machine guns are obtained by actually recording those weapons being fired, but, because of the delicate structure of a microphone, care is taken to see to it that at least fifty feet separate the mike from the explosion. Thought is also given to protecting the eardrums of the audiences who listen to such sounds. In battle movies, the noises of war are deliberately soft-pedaled. Medium-caliber gunfire is reproduced at a tenth or a twentieth of its actual intensity. And the explosion of a heavy bomb may be only a thousandth as loud in the theater as it is while shredding a Jap munition plant. It is a good thing for movie-goers that this is done. It would be possible to build theater equipment to reproduce the actual volume of sound made by gunfire and explosions, but the result would be theaters full of sound-shocked spectators rushing madly for the open spaces.

Despite the ingenuity of men like Moulton, some sounds still continue to record better when counterfeited. Still another kind of sound, starting out naturally enough, must be given a boost to help it fill the bill. Some of this boosting is done with a device a former head of Twentieth Century's sound department, named Hansen, helped develop. A space two feet square and six feet high, enclosed

in concrete, is equipped with springs. As a sound is tossed into it, it bounces around, and sound waves are transmitted from spring to spring. "The old idea was that St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York and the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City were the two best places in which to find full rich sounds complete with overtones," said Hansen. "But we found that after recording choral singing in those two places, we could add majesty to the voices of the singers by shooting the choral effects through our magic concrete box here at the studio."

"Most male actors think they can snore convincingly," said Moulton. "Maybe they can when they're really asleep, but they can certainly louse up a snore when they're just making believe. Fortunately, we have in stock a number of excellent snore sound tracks to take care of that."

Filming *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* was tough for the sound department. It couldn't shoot it in a real city, because it would have picked up too many modern sounds out of place in a period movie. The sounds needed just didn't exist any more on any city street anywhere. What Moulton was after was beer trucks rumbling on paving stones, the clang of old-style streetcars, the sound of beer-keg heads being knocked in, German bands tootling on street corners, and the squawk of newsboys crying their wares. Street-traffic noises have changed their character radically. Nowadays there are auto horns and sirens, autos backfiring, exhaust from motors, and the r-r-r-R-R-R-R of hospital ambulances. Newsboy sounds fall into fifteen or twenty different periods alone, and men like Hansen and Moulton have to know the newsboy techniques for all those periods. Almost no boys yell "Wuxtry!" any more. There was a time when a lad selling papers tried to make his words sound unintelligible, hoping that those listening would imagine some smashing news event had occurred. News vendors now make an effort to tell people what's in a paper. For another thing, newsboys now aren't apt to be boys at all, but men. "The only place we could make the Brooklyn of twenty-five or thirty years ago exist was right here on our own lot," Moulton said.

Twentieth Century-Fox was awarded an Oscar for the breaking dam and for the earthquake in the movie, *The Rains Came*. For the earthquake stuff, it merely slowed down its thunder sound track and ran it backward. "It felt just like an earthquake," said Hansen. "I've been through a couple, and I ought to know. When our earthquake came out of the amplifier, some people actually got up and started to leave the theater."

Children's voices or a baby's cries are among the hardest things to transfer to film. A group of children five to eight years old can break a sound man's heart. The frequency of their sound waves is too high and their shrill, piping voices simply won't come through naturally on a sound track. One of the ways out of the baby-voice bottleneck is to employ an adult baby-talk specialist to produce childish prattle and cries. The pitch of an adult voice is recordable, even when lifted to a Baby Snooks treble.

Footsteps often don't record well and are re-recorded on dancing mats, and a sock on the jaw sounds unreal when it is inserted on a sound track—no matter how big a lump it may raise on the one socked—so a sound man punches a leather pillow with his fist to get the desired impact. For some reason, jaws and skulls are made of acoustically different material. Once, Hansen needed the sound of a man being struck over the head with a lead pipe. To obtain it, he tried striking every kind of object, among others a cantaloupe. The cantaloupe effect was nearly right, but nearly right was not good enough. In desperation, someone suggested falling back on belaboring a real head. The result was perfection itself. The victim received a stunt man's pay for his contribution to screen realism.

"Radio sound technicians don't have the same headaches a movie sound man has," said Hansen. "On the radio, if you put in a sour sound by mistake, you hear it once and that's all. It isn't heard over and over thousands of times a day in theaters all over the country, as a movie sound boner is heard." Movie sound people, however, have one problem in common with radiomen. There are times when both movie and radio technicians strive to obtain sound effects that are deliberately untrue. To further a ghostly or supernatural

mood, it is sometimes desirable to produce a sound that seems to shimmer in the air like moonlight on a lake. For the same purpose, the production of heavenly music or ghostly music is occasionally necessary. These effects are obtained through highly technical, electrical controls.

There are some sounds virtually no one has ever heard. When the movie, *Thunderhead*, called for stallions fighting, Moulton describes his predecessor's solution of that problem. "Hansen was unable to find anyone who knew what a stallion fight sounded like. So he wove together a lot of horse stuff he had on hand—neighs, whinnies, snortings," he said. He changed the speed of that stock stuff, and he changed the pitch, and before he was through he had the doggonedest horse sounds you ever heard. He even made those stallions scream.

Back in 1927, when Al Jolson starred in the first part-talking picture, so many technical problems were involved that each scene swarmed with sound technicians. Microphones were hidden in flowerpots, behind pictures, in huge ferns and near every spot where an actor might open his mouth. When, in a deathbed sequence, the action called for Jolson to lean over his dying father and speak a few words to him, there simply wasn't any place to hide the microphone. Finally it was decided to conceal the mike in the dying father's beard, and the mike, tucked away behind his voluminous beaver, recorded what were among the very first words ever spoken in motion pictures.

It is a long trek from those mike-in-a-beard days to the directional microphones and mikes mounted on traveling booms now in use, but according to Moulton, "We ain't heard nothing yet."

"The sound tracks of tomorrow will be stereophonic," Moulton said. "The sounds they pour forth will be third-dimensional, and will seem to come from the exact place they are supposed to come from on the screen. If an actor is on a stepladder, his voice will come from there. If he's on the ground, that's where it will come from. We can't let those guys in the other departments get ahead of us."

The chances are they won't. Thanks to such men as Hansen and Moulton and those in charge of the sound departments of other studios, the movies are one place where sound has managed to travel as fast as light.

There is a growing tendency on the part of Hollywood production chiefs to pack everybody lock, stock, and kaboodle into planes or Pullmans and keep on traveling until they bump into just the streets, buildings, backgrounds, and foliage they want. But there is still work for those who juggle jungles, cacti, and forests of trees around sound stages like a man in satin pants flipping Indian clubs on the old Keith circuit.

If a studio were doing *Macbeth*, the business of bringing Birnam Wood to Dunsinane would be no trick at all to such men as Paramount's greenery man, Loren Holmes. Shakespeare accomplished this chore by having soldiers, camouflaged with leafy branches, creep up on the place. Holmes would pick the trees up bodily and give them their marching orders. If their branches looked scrawny, he would put a crew of men to work pinning the right kind of leaves on them before he moved them.

Holmes is a slave to the shooting script and the art-department sketches for a set. If a cotton field is called for, he simply buckles down and produces one, conjuring it up by sticking a type of shrub that resembles the cotton plant into the ground, then pinning on bolls. Sometimes he uses paper cotton leaves, and sometimes he uses chrysanthemum bushes, which have a leaf similar to a cotton leaf. If the script calls for a rice paddy, he plants it, if he has time; if not, he buys real rice and sinks it into a watery-looking field, blade by blade. Cornfields are set up stalk by stalk in the same way, if none are available.

Says Holmes, "Every other winter it seems that some director wants to shoot a scene with a background of gigantic white oaks—trees a hundred and twenty-five feet high and with a spread of a hundred feet. The only catch to all this is that white oaks are dormant in winter, so we have to go out and put foliage on them. For one set we foliaged up thirteen of them. In *So Proudly We*

Hail, it took twenty men ten hours for one tree. In winter, the leaves are good for about ten days before they begin to dry up and go limp on us. Sometimes it works the other way around. In making North West Mounted Police, we had to bring trees down from the mountains to mask out our sound stages and the RKO water tower in the background. We lugged in six hundred pine trees, eighty to ninety feet high, and set them up so thickly on our lot that you couldn't see through them. When we got through, we had a forest so dense that Hänsel and Gretel could have got lost in it for weeks and found a gingerbread house built like the Taj Mahal to boot. The trees in the rear ranks we set up on steel parallel bars sixty feet high, to obtain the appearance of a forest gradually climbing a mountainside."

When it came to getting ready for one of the Crosby, Hope Road, productions, Road to Utopia, Holmes sent men up to an altitude of 11,000 feet to install trees above the timber line. These men had to have their blood pressure and hearts checked before being exposed to such thin atmospheric conditions.

Holmes has quite a sizable collection of tree trunks in storage. "Every once in a while," he says, "people call up and say they have a tree they want taken out of the ground, and do we need it? I go out and look at it, and if it looks usable I bring it in." In his time he has moved twenty-five-foot Joshua trees and big organ cacti fifteen feet high.

According to Holmes, a graduate of a horticultural school would be a poor man for his job. Holmes says sadly, "He wouldn't realize that our greenery is in front of a camera only ten minutes or less. He would be thinking in long-time terms and how the stuff would look ten years from now."

Holmes hates to wait on a leisurely Mother Nature for his flora to flower and grow lush. There are ways to speed a plant's growth in the greenhouse by judicious use of heat, water and chemical fertilizer. And Holmes counts heavily on such shot-in-the-arm methods to get behind roots and push.

The studio maintains two hothouses and a huge shed in which

ferns are stored. There are 200 kinds of ferns on the lot and 100 kinds of tropical plants. Paramount's fern collection cost \$8500. Holmes' rarest plant is a *Dicksonia antarctica*. There are only a few of them in the United States.

Tropical and jungle parasitical plants are grown on rotten logs in Holmes' greenhouses. He puts the spore of the desired plant on the log and it grows. It was because of this spore-impregnation program that Holmes was able to kick through with the proper plant leaf in which to wrap a roast pig when a script called for a native Hawaiian feast. Holmes grows jungle orchids, too, but he goes to the commercial orchid growers for exotic plants with which to deck a jungle set. Most commercial flowers have a larger spread than the ordinary jungle flower, so they photograph better and register a bigger orchid wallop on the audience's eyes. Using three shifts of fifty men each, it takes the greenery department twenty-four hours to put up a jungle.

For underwater shots involving seaweed, kelp and other submarine plants, Holmes and his green-thumbed lads put the plants in a tank before the water is let in. Each plant must be suspended from the top by means of strings or wires. "In real life," Holmes explains, "sea plants have air bulbs at the top, put there by Nature to keep them afloat, but when the plants are removed from their native element to be transported to a movie set, these air-filled globes collapse.

"This song about how 'only God can make a tree' is correct," says Holmes. "I can't exactly make one, but I can whip up a reasonable facsimile, and sometimes I improve on the real thing. The wardrobe department may dress Betty Hutton, but I can take the extremely Spanish San Juan Capistrano Mission between Los Angeles and San Diego and dress it up with gnarled cypresses to look French. I had to reproduce a large section of the famous Middleton Gardens near Charleston right here on the lot for Cecil De Mille's *Reap the Wild Wind*." De Mille took Holmes with units to shoot background on location. Then, when Holmes got back to the studio, he had to reproduce the scenes from still photos. "I can bring a low, wind-blown cypress in from Monterey Peninsula and have it just as low and

wind-blown right here in the Paramount studio. I can run wild grapevines, six inches in diameter, up a wall with the aid of a few nails, and it'll be strong enough for a Romeo to climb up without taking a bad fall. And I can ivy-up an English country house in no time at all with bundles of ivy in bales, and all I have to do is spray it with preservative oil paint. So far, I haven't been able to grow a nest of robins in a tree, but, after all, that's not in my department."

But there is more to trees than picking them up and setting them down on a sound stage. Sometimes there is need for winds whispering in their branches; or for a blizzard to blow them down; or for fire to run crackling up their limbs.

This is where Lou Witte and his kind come in.

Witte is Twentieth Century-Fox's blizzard wizard. For the past twenty-odd years he has made the elements sit up and beg, jump through hoops, watch the birdie. A rainstorm put on by an overburdened cloud may be an admirable rain for getting inside of a collar or turning a Los Angeles street into a shallow river, but for movie purposes it is usually a photogenic dud. Witte takes care of that.

When he makes rain, it is possible to light that rain satisfactorily for the camera. It is always under control. It wets the right people to just the right degree of sopiness. It can be turned off and on as readily as a needle bath. Witte can make drops of water look like mist, a shower, a torrential downpour. He can produce a fog that clings close to the ground or floats airily in space. Or he can whip up a five-hundred-foot river—he did it for *Song of Bernadette*—have it flow past the cameras, reach a sump, hustle into pipes, rush back to its beginning, and flow peacefully past the camera again.

Witte's river was not the greatest of the miracles in that miracle-spangled film. But it was a miracle in its own right.

He is known in the flicker trade as an ace special-effects man, but since the days when he was a freshman wizard, the technical side of his profession has advanced amazingly. "When we made *What Price Glory?* we went out and put dynamite in the ground," he said, "and it was just God's blessing that we didn't hurt anybody when it went off. Back in the early 20's we didn't know what a fog was.

Sunrise was the first movie with a fog you could take your hat off to. That particular fog came right out of my head as much as it came out of tiny holes bored in pipes, but some of it must have stayed inside of my dome, because the patent on that invention would have been worth a quarter of a million bucks to me and I never did anything about it."

Today, Witte has fogs down to such a fine point he can give them to temperamental actors in a variety of flavors. "We make them with atomized chemical oils," he said. "We burn the grease away in advance, and when it comes out, we chill it with dry ice. The amount of chill determines whether it lies on the ground or swirls around. Our fogs are noninjurious to the lungs and mucous membranes, but sometimes we have to doll them up for sensitive players. Once we cooked up a fog flavored with wintergreen to smell like chewing gum for a child star whose mother was worried about the stuff. For Simone Simon we used incense fog. We found out what her favorite perfume was and smelled up a fog real pretty for her."

Witte still knocks on wood or crosses his fingers when he works on a picture involving gunfire or explosives. "Explosion effects were packed into Guadalcanal Diary like raisins in a fruitcake, but nobody was hurt making it," he remarked happily. "In that picture, when Tony Quinn escapes along the beach, you see Jap slugs kicking up spurts of sand and water inches away from him as he hurries along. But they weren't real bullets hitting at all. We laid a pattern of magnetically controlled compressed-air valves in the sand and water, and set them off in sequence to give a strafing impression. For effects like big shells, such as mortar shells going off when a landing party nears a beach, we mix up shellbursts and plant them in sunken oil drums controlled from a push-button board. We don't use dirt and rocks in them. We've found that when we put in chunks of cork that look like rocks, whiting, lampblack, fuller's earth, black loam and a magnesium flash, the explosion looks more like a real shell going off than a real shell does. And we don't have concussion trouble with it."

Witte is versatile in his use of compressed air. With it, he can blow water ninety feet into the air and turn over a boat or he can gentle it down to BB-gun potency. There are times, however, when "live" shooting must be used, and Witte has marksmen on call who can shoot over an actor's shoulder, put out a lamp, blast a cup and saucer from his hand or riddle a plate-glass window or an adobe wall right in front of him.

"Our rain rigging hangs fifty feet in the air," he explained. "It consists of a series of pipes held up by telephone poles. A canvas is laid over the pipes so we can control the amount of light. Water is forced up into the pipes by pumps, and the amount of pressure we put on the water determines whether we will come up with a mist, fog, light rain or heavy rain. We can rain on as much as five acres at one time."

No matter how great the quantity involved, water is Witte's dish. The lake he built for the burning of Old Chicago was filled with 2,500,000 gallons of the soppy stuff. He tied the lake's contents into the studio's fire-protection system, so that pumps could dish it out through sprinklers in case of a real conflagration.

Alfred Hitchcock's production, *Lifeboat*, offered Witte a challenge. He rose to it nobly. When the script called for floods of water to buffet the actors in the boat, tanks of water holding 30,000 gallons each were released, and waves swept down fifty-foot-high spillways slanted at an angle of fifty degrees. "Those lifeboaters really took a beating," said Witte proudly. "Our ocean was a tough guy, with no respect for glamour."

Fire is another of Witte's trained seals. Buildings to be burned are piped with jets and atomizers. Combustible fluids are pumped through these pipes and are electrically ignited. "We start a fire and turn it off just like that," exclaimed Witte, snapping his fingers like a craps-shooters. "You push a button which acts like a pilot light in your gas stove. It's a funny thing to see. One minute you have a whale of a fire crackling away, and a second later, all you've got is a little tendril of smoke curling up. Then you go out with a garden hose and put out what's smoldering, to save the set for the rest of the

shots. The mixture of combustible fluids you use and the pressure you put on the jets determine the color of the fire and the color and density of the smoke."

Anyone so expert with fire must have smoke know-how too. In the principal set for *How Green Was My Valley* there were eighty-two miners' homes, each with a chimney. Witte worked out a drip oil system, so that one man could keep the home fires burning for the entire village.

"We figured some of the miners would be more parsimonious with their coal than others, and from those houses we had only little dribbles of smoke puffing up," he said with a chuckle.

In addition to innumerable other things, Witte is also a snow man. He can produce a spotty snow for a street or cover a whole mountainside with it, as he did in *The Moon is Down*. For mountainside snow he uses gypsum. To "dress" a roof in snow, he uses excelsior or wads of paper to build up its thickness. Over that goes a skin of burlap or muslin. The skin is treated with plaster, and gypsum is sprinkled on. "For street dressing, we have our own ice machine that sprays out ground-up ice like a stream of water," said Witte. "It looks real, it sparkles and it melts and gives an authentic wet effect. For frosting a pane of glass, chemicals are stippled on with a brush. A special brand of lacquer is Jack Frost's little helper. When it dries, it cracks and forms a design with a realistic frosty tracery." For falling snow, Witte uses unparched corn flakes; and for fine, powdery snow, potato meal. Both are blown on by wind machines. Corn flakes and potato meal are light and will stay in the air without flopping soggly to the ground.

He uses wind machines as Toscanini uses a baton. With them—in addition to rain and snow storms—he can simulate a sandstorm, using bran or fuller's earth for sand. A combination of wind machines and the machine that chews up ice into a fine spray gives him a winter blizzard. One of his pet inventions is a "directional" wind. A breeze is brought on a set through a tube, and with it Witte can blow a zephyr through an actor's marcelled hair or rustle the leaves of a tree.

In addition to green and growing ones, an army of studio workers are concerned with other kinds of props. When I first heard of a thing called a prop box, I went hunting for one. All prop men have them, but I had been told that prop man Harry Edwards' box was something special, an amazing collection of gadgets that had saved his studio thousands of dollars.

Inside of the blimp-hangar emptiness of a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer sound stage, I asked for him. Fingers pointed him out. I walked over to a tall man standing beside a box that resembled an outsize bureau and told him that I had come to see his prop box.

There were legends about Edwards. In 1924 while working on *Ben Hur*, he ran out of smoke pots, with a battle scene coming up. He experimented with various substitute smoke effects. Finally he reached into his box, brought out some old film, rolled it into balls, doused them with water and lighted them. They worked perfectly.

For a night shot, after the commissary had closed, he once produced a "steak." He took a fielder's glove from his box, trimmed it to size, garnished it with phony parsley—also from his box—before it was photographed.

In *Captains Courageous* a call for 600 codfish found another prop man, George Lee, with no cod. Instead, he used 600 yellowstails with codlike spots painted on them. As the cameras rolled, the fish were hauled in, beheaded, slit, flattened out. Before the shooting was done, they were used up. Lee stayed up all night sewing them together to use the next day. His prop box held just the right needle and thread.

Harry Edwards has to be good to keep up with such craftsmen. When a director called for a bunion plaster for Marie Dressler, another prop man, unfazed, produced from his box of magic a candy mint with a hole in it. He strapped it on with adhesive tape.

Edwards unlocked his closely guarded box and opened a drawer for me to peer into. In it were beauty spots for a French court, mustache holders to keep mustaches flat while sleeping, snuffboxes—with snuff—stove-lid lifters. "They're antiques, and hard to find," Edwards said. In other drawers were hatpins, lighter flints, bullets,

sugar pills, a rubber device for making "razzberries," a pitch pipe to start quartets in tune, whistles used by French postmen, English postmen and Chicago traffic cops.

There were material for dimming high lights on glass and chocolate sirup to simulate blood in black-and-white pictures. "We used to use carmine," Edwards told me. "Chocolate washes out of clothes better." There were painters' masks to keep powdered synthetic snow out of actors' noses, resin to prevent slipping on slick floors, tobacco in drawstring sacks, and aluminum powder to form dancing dust motes in shafts of sunlight. There were matchboxes from everywhere in the world, even the wax vestas used in Latin countries. There were toupee wax, glycerin for tears, streetcar conductors' punches, firecrackers, and clips for cyclists to wear on their pants legs.

"I've got about four thousand items in that box," Edwards whispered. "The Andy Hary series alone used two thousand. In the prop building are fifty thousand more listed in a two-thousand-five hundred-and-nineteen-page catalogue." Edwards keeps what he calls his "working props"—cameras, soft drinks for "highballs," and umbrellas—in still another box.

"What about false bosoms?" I whispered. There was a hint of regret in his voice when he replied, "Make-up is in charge of them now."

The catch with even such mustard grains in Hollywood's salad dressing as Edwards' prop box is that there must be no kick-backs from them in the way of nuisance suits, or efforts to shake the studio down. A look at the files kept by Hollywood's legal research departments proves that Americans are confirmed insult seekers.

Hanging in the office of one such department are photostatic copies of successful lawsuits against the studio. Under this depressing reminder, constant warfare is waged against screen material detrimental or semi-detrimental to any person living or dead. A startling paradox results from this warfare. Studios knock themselves punchy seeing to it that every detail of make-up, costuming, and set decoration is correct; yet at the same time they maintain staffs of research-

ers and attorneys who work beaver-hard to make sure that some of the things seen and heard on the screen are deliberately inaccurate!

If, for instance, you hear Greer Garson give her telephone number in a picture, don't waste a nickel dialing it. She won't answer. Nor will there be an irate citizen at the other end, huffing, puffing and threatening trouble because his sleep is disturbed. Chances are you will find yourself talking to the local Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer manager who has lent his number for the scene. Or the operator will tell you there is no such number. If Greer's screen telephone number is listed under an exchange followed in real—not reel—life by five numerals, those numerals are shrunk to four; if four, they are boosted to five.

It costs hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to lay you such stymies, as well as to keep you from recognizing your own auto-license plates on a car loaded with fleeing film dope peddlers. The studio makes its own plates, the combination of letters and numerals carefully snafued. The house numbers that appear in movies exist only on vacant lots or imaginary continuations of streets after they disappear into the countryside.

Unauthorized use of names is a primary breeder of damage suits. To make sure they belong to no one, movie names are checked against real ones in studio reference libraries, city directories, telephone books, genealogical histories, Who's Who, and newspapers.

Insurance against any of the 144,000,000 citizens of the U.S.A. bearing a name used by a movie character is not so difficult to obtain as might seem. By changes in spelling, a name can be fancied up into one that nobody ever labored under through life. Two characters in *On an Island With You* were United States naval officers. Checking the Navy roster, M-G-M came up with the names Kingslee and Harrisen. There may be Kingsleys and Harrisons among our sea dogs, but no Kingslees or Harrisens. If plots are favorable, permission to use their names is usually given by public figures. Exceptions are columnist Walter Winchell and former screen siren Theda Bara.

M-G-M even owns a fictitious racing stable. Names of steeds from

that stable who ran swiftly in *Gallant Bess* and *My Brother Talks to Horses* are registered with the racing authorities, so that no one else can ever use them. Legal-research departments are careful to avoid scenes or dialogue derogatory to any organized group. When, in one script, a child refused a glass of milk, the scene was deleted for fear of outraged dairy farmers, angry milk-bar proprietors or embattled Granges would think it anti-milk-drinking propaganda.

Commercial products or services are not displayed to the disadvantage of a competitor. One outdoor set was changed because it included a poster advertising a certain cigarette. Fictitious labels for cans, bottles or packages are designed and printed. Studios manufacture train and bus tickets bearing the names of synthetic transportation companies. They carry the warning: "Manufactured by (name of studio) for picture purposes only." So far, there is no record of a finder of such pasteboards trying to set out to see America first for free.

8. *Eighty-Eight Keys to Stardom*

Some of those who have reached those far places in the movie heavens where the stars revolve in lonely grandeur have made it there with almost none of the accepted, conventional stellar equipment. Some have made it because of an oddity in the way their vocal chords are constructed which makes the notes they sing mesmeric. Some have made it with feet that click on a hardwood floor with machine gun precision. Some have made it with one sultry, drawled phrase ("Come up and see me sometime.") Others have made it simply by using a piano for the sweet chariot to transport them into the Milk Way.

A bogged-in-the-hocks, spavined upright was Hoagy Carmichael's sky-climbing vehicle to the place where the stardust he fashioned into a song of the love-smitten floats in long streamers of light. Movie actor, radio performer, composer of some sixty songs, among them *Old Rocking Chair*, *Buttermilk Sky*, *Small Fry*, and *Hong-kong Blues*, he describes his entrance into the world thus:

"On a dull November day near the turn of the century a child was born in a small four-room cottage at the southern end of Grant Street in Bloomington, Indiana. My mother's mother, Grandma Robison, was there to rub my head back into shape and pour stuff into my eyes. I've been uncomfortable ever since."

The statement is not just Hoagy yakety-yaketying for the sake of making a wry crack. The Carmichael seen on the screen and heard on the air is a slowpoke, a lazybones. Privately he is introverted and intense to the point of acute discomfort. He once wrote

a song called Two Sleepy People—about a girl and boy much too much in love to say good night. Hoagy himself is two people, but only one of them is sleepy.

When his nonchalant performances on the screen or air waves bring him critical acclaim, Hoagy stalls off a comfortable state of mind by brooding about how much better he would have been if the cutters hadn't scissored his best song or kicked his most effective footage around, or by bawling himself out for delivering his radio lines too fast.

The saying about him: "He's got so many careers he has to make a date with himself to turn out a tune," is not wholly an exaggeration. Handling the success that has come his way after many a frustrating detour keeps him mighty active. For Hoagy is big business now. It takes him quite a spell just to mention the sources from which his current income rolls in.

His singing, done in a Southern Indiana drawl that sounds as if it were being strained through a rust-caked trombone instead of a human larynx, has caught on with the juke-box crowd like crazy. It is a solid click with disk buyers and movie-goers. He gets wads of fan mail from both bobby and nylon soxers, many of whom write that they infinitely prefer him to either Sinatra or Crosby. As many singers work on the theory that it's profitable to imitate his highly stylized song delivery as there are cartoonists who woo affluence by aping the artists who draw Superman and Flash Gordon. In short, at the moment Hoagy is as hot as a two-dollar trumpet.

When, in accepting the Oscar for producing the best movie of 1946, the world's No. 1 name fumbler, Sam Goldwyn, recited the names of the actors who had helped him make *The Best Years of Our Lives* memorable, the audience held its breath in delighted anticipation. Sam navigated all the nomenclatural shoals without a mishap, except Hoagy's. Then he came through nobly. He referred to Hoagy as "Hugo Carmichael."

Hoagy wasn't amused. The proceedings were going out over a national hookup, and he complained that it was tough for a guy

to spend a lifetime familiarizing the public with his name, only to have an unreasonable facsimile of it receive such publicity.

All the evidence proves that he was unnecessarily worried. Hoagy and his compositions are known wherever jazz music is played. In the United States, the trade calls numbers like *Star Dust* swing standards. In England, they are known as "evergreens."

Hoagy has an ASCAP rating of AA, which brings him an average of \$20,000 a year. AA—Irving Berlin, Cole Porter and the late George Gershwin are also listed AA—is as high as such ratings go. ASCAP means the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, and an ASCAP rating is based on how many times a song written by one of its members is played by a band, selected by a juke-box addict before dropping in his nickel or used as part of a broadcast. Fees for such use are collected by ASCAP and passed along to its members.

Hoagy's price tag for movie work is \$5000 a week. To all of this he adds his revenue from his weekly radio show, from his guest appearances on other radio shows—this year they will bring him in about \$20,000—and fees for endorsing such items as radio-phonograph combinations, hats, beer, a writing paper called "*Star Dust*." There is also the money he makes through selling his songs for use in movies.

The paradox of the easygoing Carmichael versus the broodingly intense Carmichael is only one of several such contradictions in his life. He is a top-flight plugger of popular songs, yet he was booted out of a quartet at Indiana University because he couldn't sing for sour apples. Hoagy describes his singing as, "I do it the way a shaggy dog looks. . . . I figure there is hair hanging on my voice." And he says he has "Wabash frogs and sycamore twigs" in his throat.

The secret of Hoagy's song-plugging effectiveness lies in his phrasing. Phrasing means establishing a wedding between words and music as they're sung. "I talk a song to you so you know exactly what it means and says," he explains. "I'm a guy who tries to enunciate."

Some women claim he possesses the sexiest male voice they ever heard. In the opinion of one distaff writer, he is "an extraordinarily tasteful idiomatic jazz singer. . . . His style is a restrained off-blue." While they were at it, the music analysts also described Hoagy's person. According to them he is "a dark-haired, brown-eyed fellow with foxy features . . . , an Indiana Jimmy Walker."

Mere mention of some of the tunes he has written is calculated to start millions of people to humming, but when he faces a microphone, Hoagy can't remember the lyrics of his own songs. He has to have the words written out for him.

By his own admission, he is no great shakes as a piano player. "My playing has deteriorated," he complains. "I can't honestly say it amounts to playing any more. I just finger my own little compositions. If they are slow enough, I don't have to finger fast. And I oompah the bass against my own vocalizing." Only recently has he learned to read music. He still does it slowly and haltingly. He sweats out the notes on the sheet as a lip-moving child sweats out the sentences in a first reader.

The list of Carmichael paradoxes seems endless. Among the repeat customers who went back to see the movies *To Have and Have Not*, *Canyon Passage* and *Johnny Angel* for a second or even a third helping, there were many who went to see Hoagy do his character bits rather than watch Lauren Bacall, Humphrey Bogart, George Raft and Randy Scott star in those pictures. Yet, his only previous experience as an actor was as a monkey in a college skit in the annual Christmas Showdown at Indiana University. His act required him to stay aloft on a limb, clad in a union suit, for fifteen minutes. After that, he descended to deliver his single line of dialogue to the keeper of the monkey house: "Where've you been all this time, daddy?"

Hoagy's memory of this incident is not too clear, but, apocryphal or not, assiduous researchers dug it up and have labeled it fact.

When he was married, the members of his wedding party pooled their resources to speed him on his honeymoon. He had forgotten to draw any money from the bank for that purpose. Yet he was

canny enough to shake down Opportunity for a sizable chunk of gold when that unpredictable visitor finally rapped at his door.

His coast-to-coast program, *A Visit to Hoagy's* was rated as a successful one. It has been described as having "quiet informality," as being "as All-American-sounding as Fibber McGee." Yet his dislike for radio work approaches a phobia.

Hoagy's method of selecting the songs he sings on his weekly broadcast is to sit in his own home and warble a dozen or more tunes to his producer over the phone. From these, five are chosen. This procedure helps to keep the more abrasive aspects of radio out of his hair. There are no clockers standing around with stop watches, no tongues clucking worriedly over whether or not the program will overflow its allotted fifteen minutes.

Another pianist, Buddy Cole, helped him out on his fifteen-minute air show; or rather, Hoagy occasionally helped him. Cole carried most of the show's piano burden. He played a grand, while now and then Hoagy beat it out on an upright. There has been an upright in his life ever since he can remember. "I can't seem to get anything out of a grand," he says. "My fingers are trained for an upright's action. I like the way its keys go up and flop back."

In the beginning there was "the old golden oak." "That golden-oak upright was very important to me," Hoagy says. "Back in Bloomington, Indiana, we didn't have much of this world's goods, but the golden oak with mother playing it while all of us listened kept the Carmichaels together. When we went away, it was something to come back to."

Hoagy's mother played for the Indiana University fraternity and sorority dances. "She took me with her to those parties when I was little," Hoagy says, "and I slept on two chairs placed side by side."

One day a back-lot baseball game was rained out. Young Hoagland—his mother and his grandparents called him that, although no one else did—came home feeling let down. Hurling his baseman's glove into a corner, he wandered into the parlor and drummed on the keys of the golden oak with his fists. Through the dripping rain he heard the college carillonneur play Indiana Frangi-

pani in the campus bell tower. "I started picking out the notes with one finger," Hoagy remembers. "To my amazement, I found I was picking them out accurately. That day an incompetent sixty-pound third baseman died. The piano had me."

His mother showed him the simple construction of the bass and the fifth until his ear wouldn't let him play a sour note. After listening to her, Hoagy groped for the chords she'd fingered, then sought the ones she *hadn't* played that were there in the upright waiting to be discovered.

The Carmichaels lived in half of a double house. A thin wall separated them from the folks next door. Young Hoagy's heels stomping on the floor as he rode the piano pedals must have driven his neighbors crazy. But they were gentle, kindly folk, patient with a kid trying to learn. They never beefed.

When the piano tuner left after one of his visits, Hoagy tore the golden oak down and tuned it himself. He tried to make it sound tinny. He fixed it so a string here and there would be slightly off key and give out a "whanging" sound.

Carmichael, Senior, was in the hack business and had a fast line of rubber-tired conveyances for hire. Hoagy's father moved to Indianapolis, then to Montana, then back to Bloomington; finally to Indianapolis again. In 1916 Hoagy entered Manual High in Indianapolis, but the school filled him with rebellion rather than learning, and he quit. ("I parted from Manual High with neither of us grieving.") After Manual he ran a cement mixer and worked in a slaughterhouse.

Came World War I. Studying the Army weight requirements, he loaded up with water and bananas until he was a few ounces above the minimum poundage, but en route to the recruiting headquarters he shrank and his skinny body failed to balance the scales. Undismayed, he kept on trying. One day he made it. The day was November 10, 1918. He drilled for a whole hour the next morning. Then the war was over.

His first conception of what jazz could be like came to him in Indianapolis from a long-fingered Negro boy named Reggie Duval.

"Reggie featured a broken rhythm and a flighty and unfinished syncopation," Hoagy says. "He stressed the afterbeat and laughed with the keys, as unrestrained and unreserved as a hyena." It was Reggie who told Hoagy, "I want that harmony to holler. Never play anything that ain't right. You may not make any money, but you'll never get hostile with yourself."

Despite such interludes, Hoagy was lonely for Bloomington. In January, 1919, with ten painfully scraped together dollars as capital, he returned there to re-enter high school. He lived with his Grandma Robison. Before long the president of his high-school fraternity heard him doodling away on a piano in the fraternity rooms while another fraternity brother stroked a set of drums.

The president's reaction was immediate: "Let's throw a dance! I'll give you guys five bucks apiece if we take in that much."

That night Hoagy played in an upstairs hall over a hardware store. "I took a deep breath and hit the keys," he says. "And the building began to roll. The dance was on." There were twenty couples present when the dance began. Soon there were thirty. In the end, couples were being turned away.

The fraternity next heard of a hot Negro band in Louisville—Jordan's—and signed it to play for a dance. Hoagy learned still more about jazz from Jordan. "He hit the notes on the head and made them pop at you," he says.

Hoagy couldn't wait until he went to Chicago to hear the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. "When the cornet player played his notes they smacked me in the face at unexpected moments. They went right through my gizzard and dropped on the floor, making my feet jump."

But the greatest single influence in his life was a Davenport, Iowa, boy named Bix Biederbecke. Bix played cornet for a band called the Wolverines. Hoagy first heard Bix's cornet on the Indiana University campus when the Wolverines played there for an SAE dance. To Hoagy, the notes Bix blew were as clean as a mallet hitting a chime. "Bix showed me that jazz could be musical and beautiful as well as hot," says Hoagy. "He showed me that tempo

doesn't necessarily mean fast. He had perfect pitch. He could tell the pitch of a healthy burp in the next room and pick it out on the piano unerringly."

Hoagy's hero-worship of Bix was so all-consuming that he bought a cornet and tried to master it until he blew his lips raw. In self-defense his fraternity brothers hid the cornet in a chandelier.

On September 15, 1922, he entered the university, where he was pledged Kappa Sigma. He had entered Indiana to study law, but before long he assembled a band of his own, Carmicheal's Collegians. The Collegians played everything by ear. Their ambition was to play hot licks and play them clean. They liked to throw their saxophones and drumsticks in the air. During those spasms Hoagy pushed the piano stool aside and assumed the position of a praying mantis to play while the drummer tossed his drumsticks aloft and chewed his tongue.

The rest of his seven-piece band could read music, but once they teamed up with Hoagy they seldom saw written music again. It was difficult to follow his lead. At first he played a lot of black keys and flats. Then, when they got used to that, he changed over and did most of his playing in sharps. They called their music "sock" music or "dirt," which meant that they accentuated the second and fourth beats instead of the first and third. They "doodled" the harmony and improvised on the tune.

Musicians passing through Indianapolis stretched their journey as far as the university campus at Bloomington. Word had got around that the kids there "had something" when it came to accentuating the afterbeat. "In my day, college boys were inventing things musically," Hoagy claims.

It was a time of kicking over the traces, of yeast working in those who had lived through a world war. Hoagy and a group of kindred souls were the moving spirits of the revolt against conformity on the Indiana campus. As far as Hoagy was concerned, the revolt had its expression in "sock" music and in associating with a rampantly uninhibited group of students who called themselves the Bent Eagles. William Moenkhaus was founder and chief spokesman, and Wad

Allen, now director of publicity for the Johns-Manville Corporation, was a Bent Eagle too.

The headquarters of the Bent Eagles was the Book Nook, a campus restaurant. In its past the Book Nook might have contained books, but when the Bent Eagles discovered it, it was equipped with booths, a beat-up player piano, coffee, egg sandwiches laced with catsup, wedges of lemon-meringue pie and tables—no books. It was owned by a long-suffering Greek named Pete Costas.

Afternoons in the Book Nook found Hoagy flogging the piano while Moenkhaus composed and read aloud a playlet entitled, *Thanksgiving Comes But Once a Dozen*, or a eulogy beginning: "The years have pants!" The Bent Eagles thought he was a genius. Lovingly they quoted the line they thought his best: "I just saw a cow go by . . . one by one."

Wad Allen says of Hoagy, "Every time he got interested in learning how to do something, his friends thought he was going crazy before he mastered the problem. When he puts his mind to something he really gets on the outside of it before he lets go." At Indiana, Hoagy tried to get on the outside of such things as torts and misdemeanors.

Neither Hoagy nor the other members of his band thought of themselves as musical professionals. After making a few recordings of their dance rhythms for a record manufacturer in Richmond, Indiana, named Gennett—Gennett records are now collectors' items—they received a telegraphed invitation to come to New York to record for Brunswick, then a large disk producer. That wire scared them half to death. They didn't go.

But something was gnawing at Hoagy. He wanted to know how to compose a tune. One winter he left college and joined a small band in Florida to play at private parties. At such a party he heard Irving Berlin play his latest song. Berlin played it with charm, but Hoagy noticed that the author of Alexander's Ragtime Band felt for the ivories uncertainly. *Hoagland*, he told himself, *if anyone who plays that feebly can write that nobly, you can write a song too.*

Back in Bloomington, studying law once more, the idea of com-

posing still simmered in him. That simmering caught up with him in the Book Nook. His fingers picked out a phrase. He played it again and again, until the monotony of his playing emptied the Nook. Before supper he had it. When Bix heard the melody he suggested that the Wolverines record it for Gennett. It's title was Riverboat Shuffle.

One morning Hoagy drifted into the Book Nook again. All that day he tried to capture a tune. The harmony he pulled from the keys sounded like a colored mammy washing a stack of dirty clothes. He called it Washboard Blues.

Curt Hitch and his Happy Harmonists, a band that played in the Wolverines' style, recorded it for Gennett. Before that recording the technician discovered that Washboard Blues was twenty seconds short. Hitch suggested that Hoagy put in a piano solo. In five minutes, Hoagy dreamed one up. Years later, when a movie studio needed a song in a hurry, he took that eight-bar solo and built it into a song. Johnny Mercer wrote the lyrics for it. It was called Lazy Bones.

Hoagy was graduated in law at mid-term in 1926. His family had moved to Florida—everybody in the world, it seemed, was either moving to Florida or voyaging to Europe, student third class—and Hoagy decided to join them and hang out his shingle. His work in Miami consisted of helping to sew legal patches on the pants of the real-estate boom when they grew tattered and tramplike. Even that didn't last long. After playing in ten-cent dance halls for two months to keep eating, he went back to Indiana.

He met Paul Whiteman when Whiteman's band came to Indianapolis. Bix Beiderbecke was a member of the Whiteman organization, and introduced Hoagy to the Rhythm Boys. Bing Crosby was one of them.

Whiteman's greeting was, "I've heard a lot about you, little fella." Despite the fact that any reference to Paul's bulk was regarded as lese majesty, Hoagy replied, "I've heard a lot about you, too, big boy." But Whiteman liked Hoagy's spirit.

Whiteman had heard the recording of Washboard Blues. He led

Hoagy to a piano and said, "Sing it." The upshot of his singing was an invitation from Whiteman to go to Chicago and sing for the record Whiteman had promised the Victor Company to make of Washboard Blues. Hoagy didn't find out until later that Whiteman had Bing Crosby all warmed up and ready to do his singing for him if he weakened.

On a visit to Bloomington just before the opening of the university's fall term, the melody of Star Dust floated into his head. Walking through the university campus late one night, he was conscious of the brightness of the Milky Way and of the North Star hanging low above the trees. He sat on the "spooning wall" while a phrase of whistled music stole from his lips. He ran back to the Book Nook, excitement driving him. "Got to use your piano," he told the proprietor.

Stu Gorrell, Hoagy's roommate at Indiana, named the melody. To Stu, it sounded like the dust from stars drifting down through a summer sky. Somewhat later Hoagy wrote the original lyrics. It took him twenty minutes. Two years passed before Mitchell Parrish, a member of the staff of a music-publishing house, polished them and put them into their final form.

Trying to be a lawyer in Indianapolis didn't work out for Hoagy, and he gave it up. Folks wanted him to write music or play it. Some who know him best think he is still sad because he isn't an attorney.

With the law behind him, he found himself playing second piano with an itinerant band. Then he decided to have a try at Hollywood. He started out in an upper berth with a couple of suits and a few songs under his arm. He had thought of one of those songs, Old Rockin' Chair, early one morning swimming in a Bloomington reservoir. He tried the movie studios without success; but he wasn't lonely. Paul Whiteman and his band were there making The King of Jazz, and with Whiteman were Bix Biederbecke and Bing Crosby. Hoagy beat his way back to New York on the special train that carried the Whiteman outfit East. He slept in an upper berth with Bing.

In New York he lived in a cubbyhole in Greenwich Village. "I figured at least twenty old men had died in that house during the hundred years it had existed," he says. In such surroundings he wasn't liking New York fast, but he stuck it out, doing a little recording and arranging for practically no dough. After the '29 crash he went to work as a third-string banker. He third-stringed as an investment analyst and in the trust department of the Chase National Bank and the S. W. Straus Company. When bonds began to fold, people kept coming in to scream, "Why are my bonds worth so much less?" Hoagy was supposed to pacify them. When the bottom fell out of Wall Street he took another job in a music-publishing house as an arranger.

For years *Star Dust* had set no worlds afire. Suddenly it was seized upon joyfully by musicians and vocalists. It was recorded by Isham Jones, Louis Armstrong and the Boswell Sisters, and was reissued in sheet-music form. It has since sold 1,000,000 sheet-music copies. Some homes have three or four versions of it in record form. Tens of thousands of college boys and girls have walked out into the moonlight from waxed dance floors to plight their troths under its melting influence. To date, Hoagy says it has paid him over \$200,000 in ASCAP money. Although it was written in 1928, the royalties from it still bring him more than \$5000 a year.

For Hoagy the next few years were a blend of many things good and bad. Bix Biederbecke died. Bix had reached the top, but he heard notes in his head he couldn't blow out through his cornet. Hoagy thought that finding that out killed him.

Hoagy wrote *Lazy River*, *Georgia on My Mind*, and for a Broadway musical revue starring Beatrice Lille, *Little Old Lady*. His *Lazy Bones*, with lyrics by Johnny Mercer, sold 15,000 copies a day and helped pull Tin Pan Alley out of the depression. He also met an attractive girl, Ruth Meinardi, and married her.

After his marriage, at Ruth's urging, Hoagy decided to have another try at Hollywood. He made a two-reeler as part of a series featuring musicians, then moved to the Paramount lot as a song writer. He wrote *Small Fry* and *Two Sleepy People* for that studio.

Between 1936 and 1939 he contributed songs to such films as *Anything Goes*; *Sing, You Sinners*; *Thanks for the Memory*; and *St. Louis Blues*.

Slim Hawks, the ex-wife of movie producer Howard Hawks, was responsible for giving him his big chance—a part in *To Have and Have Not*. Before that he had been briefly in a movie called *Topper*—so briefly the audience saw only the back of his head.

"Slim is a neighbor and one of my best friends," Ruth Carmichael says. "She came over to see us one day while Hoagy was on a stepladder helping the gardener. He hadn't shaved for two days. His corduroys were rolled up and his hair was down over his face. Slim took one look at him and said, 'You ought to be in pictures.'" Her husband had already been thinking of Hoagy for the part of Cricket, a hot-piano player in a Martinique honky-tonk, for his next film, but up to that point Hawk's thinking had only got to the point of deciding, "Hoagy might be a good actor because he makes such screwy faces when he sings." When Slim went to work on him that cinched it. *To Have and Have Not* marked the debut of a new Carmichael.

Hoagy's *Hong Kong Blues* had been written in 1938, but when Hoagy played and sang it in *To Have and Have Not*, it started rolling like a snowball down a cliff. At one point after its release, records of *Hong Kong Blues* were selling 25,000 daily. The song finally racked up a sale of more than 500,000 disks. Sheet-music sales of Carmichael's compositions jumped 30 per cent.

All of this helped him purchase a home set in three acres of tidily manicured land at a cost of more than \$100,000. It is U-shaped and built around a swimming pool. Its windows look out over yellow-striped beach chairs and purple jacaranda trees. The carefully guarded Carmichael children—Randy Bob, seven, and Hoagy Bix, nine—sleep in a small house at the far end of the pool. Hoagy cuts his own hair and has barbered his sons' hair since their birth. He quit going to barbers because "they cut a man's hair too short in back."

Not only is Hoagy now trying to "get outside of" acting, as he

once tried to get outside of law, he also applies his intense brand of perfectionism to golf and tennis.

Some time ago, at the Bel Air Country Club, he made a hole in one. The other members of his foursome suggested an adjournment to the nineteenth hole for a celebration. Hoagy said, "I think I'll try to do it again." It wasn't a gag. He was dead serious.

He found time to write an autobiography, *The Star-Dust Road*. It is chronologically chaotic, but otherwise extremely effective. A large portion of it is devoted to giving credit to those who helped jazz grope and thump its way into being. Hoagy thinks that the best dance band ever assembled was the Jean Goldkette Band that played in Detroit's Greystone Ballroom. In it, among others were Joe Venuti, the Dorseys, Bix Biederbecke and Frank Trumbauer.

Because he writes primarily to please himself, Hoagy's music is not easy for others to play. According to a friend who has known him for years, "In Hoagy's case, when he manages to distill the essence of the special something that's his, it's too complicated to be popular. When he comes up with only a fragment of it, it's half-baked. When he hits in between those two, it's sheer genius."

Another kind of piano, not an upright but a concert-sized ebony-hued one, was the jet propelled Pegasus the prodigious Señor, Jose Iturbi, rode soaringly into the cinema firmament.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's Eddie Lawrence, a nice, grinny guy with a lanky, high-jumper build, helped me map my campaign for getting the Señor down on paper. "You'll want to see Joe Pasternak, George Sidney, and our dramatic coach, Lillian Burns," he said.

Pasternak has produced all of the Iturbi films. Sidney has directed them. Lillian Burns' tutoring has helped transform the pianist into an actor.

Lawrence turned me over to a svelte, blond helper named Melvina Pumphrey. She guided me through the sprawling jungle of sound stages and studio streets, toward the "Iron Lung," where Pasternak and Sidney do their thinking. The "Iron Lung" is the name M-G-M employees give to the building that houses the studio's administration offices. It's an apt label. The building is

gleaming white, surgically clean, modern, superfunctional. In it people labor all day—and sometimes all night—to breathe the breath of life into stars who might otherwise succumb to box-office suffocation.

En route I told Pumphrey that I was starting from scratch with Iturbi. I said that where music and musicians were concerned I was still in the kindergarten and admitted that my store of information about him was scant. I'd seen him in several movies in which the camera had shot his stubby, capering fingers and his round, Eddie Cantor eyes from every possible angle—as well as from a few outlandish ones, such as from inside a piano cased in glass.

I'd read that in June, 1946, he had collected the biggest royalty check ever paid to anyone anywhere—a staggering \$118,029.69 from RCA-Victor for a six-months' sale of his phonograph records. The figure had put him in the same category with musical Midases Enrico Caruso and Alma Gluck. Most of his huge checks had come from the hot-cake demand for a two-platter album of his. On those two platters were recorded selections from the music he had played for Columbia's filmed version of Chopin's life. The rest of the royalty check was his royalties from a twelve-inch two-sided recording of Chopin's Polonaise in A Flat. Eight hundred thousand copies of his Polonaise were sold. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer bigheartedly relaxed their contract with him long enough to let him finger a piano for Columbia, but only with the proviso that he be given no screen credit for the work.

Also I'd heard that at times he was temperamentally erratic. Once, in Cleveland, he was reported to have flown into a tantrum because the audience munched hot dogs, and had smacked their mustard-streaked lips when they should have sat, mouths agape, listening to him play. At Philadelphia's Robin Hood Dell he had indulged in a spot of chair throwing.

A friend of mine had witnessed that Philadelphia musical Donnybrook. "Iturbi was conducting at the Dell," my friend had told me. "Mayor La Guardia, of New York, was there, but the Little Flower was unusually unobtrusive and handled himself with decorum.

Not so, Philadelphia's then mayor, S. Davis Wilson. The orchestra had been going strong for ten minutes when Wilson and his party walked down the center aisle. Wilson did everything but give the crowd a prize fighter's greeting with two hands clasped above his head. Part of the crowd cheered. Others hissed. The orchestra kept on manfully pitching with Beethoven, but the going was rough. Flashlights flared as the press photographers shot the mayor's entrance. Iturbi's back was turned and he thought that the crowd was hissing Albert Spalding, the guest violinist, and himself.

"Spalding said to the mayor, 'Go away. The people want to hear the music, not watch you.' But Wilson marched right up onto the stage. The flashlights popped all over again."

Spalding tucked his violin under his arm and stalked offstage. Iturbi followed. His sulphurous mutterings were picked up by the microphone. A chair sailed out of the wings and Mayor La Guardia ducked. Finally Iturbi was persuaded that the hissing had been for the cameramen, and came back, still pale with indignation, to resume Beethoven's music.

"It didn't seem temperamental to me," my friend said. "For my money the only thing out of line was that Iturbi threw only one chair."

Aside from these things, I had a vague idea that he was one of music's all-time greats and that he had been born in Valencia, Spain. That was the sum of my Iturbiana.

Pumphrey gave me a quick take-out on Señor Iturbi's value to M-G-M in dollars and cents. Every picture in which he has appeared has been a top M-G-M grosser. *Anchors Aweigh* was among the first five money-makers of 1946. It grossed well over \$4,000,000. *Holiday in Mexico* has ballooned into the same bracket.

William Powell once described the Iturbi films by saying, "I'm in one of those musicals into which they cut a few feet of Iturbi every ten minutes." Naturally, Pumphrey didn't put it that way. Nor did she tell me that he is paid \$60,000 a picture. I found that out elsewhere. The figure is given out for public consumption as

\$100,000. Hollywood works on the notion that it's a good rule to give the money paid for anything a stiff boost whenever such sums are mentioned—makes them seem more eye-bugging and fabulous-sounding.

Pasternak's office was guarded by a reception room and a trim buffer secretary, but with Pumphrey as my passport, I was ushered in.

Pasternak is exuberantly articulate. Words spray from him like drops from a needle shower. He paces up and down while he talks. I mentioned Iturbi's boogie-woogie playing in *Thousands Cheer*, the sequence that gave musical classicists a shock treatment. I asked if it had been difficult to persuade him to go through with it.

"Some people thought it was going to be tough," Pasternak told me. "The men scheduled to make the movie were sitting in my office worrying. Their faces were as long as bloodhounds' faces. The people who run the Theatre Guild would probably look the same way if they were arguing about asking Katherine Cornell or Helen Hayes to do a strip tease and the bumps. You know what I mean. The timid ones suggested, 'Why don't we tell him if he does it we'll only play the film for soldiers and sailors in the camps or that if he doesn't like it after he has done it, we won't use it at all?' Somebody even suggested, 'We can tell him we will have somebody else do it for him, and he can just go through the motions.'"

Pasternak, who is called M-G-M's Mahatma of Music for The Masses, snorted to his associates, "Let's be honest with the guy. Let's not pretend we are going to play the film in tunnels or caves. Let's tell him, 'Look, Jose, we want some boogiewoogie out of you. This is your chance to show people you can give your music a short haircut.'"

A delegation was appointed to broach the project to Iturbi. With them went an expert lugging a roll of red-hot boogiewoogie under his arm. He had been engaged to show Iturbi how the thing was done. The delegation found the pianist on a sound stage knocking a few crisp, clean Debussy notes out of a handy piano. Approaching him, they made their request. He reached for the music roll spread

it upon the piano before him, ran his eye over it and brought his hands down on the keys. When he was through, Iturbi grinned and said, "Hokay," and the boogiewoogie authority slunk away.

"He had the hottest left hand you ever heard," Pasternak said. "Sounded as if he had been beating hell out of that stuff all of his life. You know what I mean?"

Pasternak said that in the last few years this country has made more musical strides than any other country ever made. "There are now more symphony orchestras in the United States than in all Europe put together. There are even more orchestras than gunmen. In Europe the thing is tradition. Over here it is enjoyment. You've got to educate people up to caviar by serving it with something they're familiar with, like chopped onions and grated hard-boiled eggs. With Iturbi's help, we serve them classical music with onions and grated hard-boiled eggs."

Pasternak thinks that Iturbi's piano playing in the movies has been responsible for largely increasing the number of pianos sold. Also the number of boys and girls whose mammas and papas save money so their offspring can "take" from the nearest piano teacher.

Pasternak grinned. "When I tell some people that, they think of all the zillions of sour notes those kids are going to hit, and they shudder. But when we wanted fifty kids to play classical music for *Anchors Aweigh*, the question came up, Where would we get them? We put an ad in the paper saying we wanted children between the ages of six and twelve who were accomplished pianists. The next day the studio was full of them. We auditioned them for a week. They were all good." Pasternak believes that Iturbi's movie success had a big part in helping this happen.

Originally Pasternak had wanted another pianist for *Thousands Cheer*. The other pianist read the script, but refused to let his music be filmed under that title. "It is," he said, drawing himself up haughtily, "beneath my dignity." Pasternak figured it this way: "That guy could have had millions of people listening to him instead of a hatful, if he had wanted to. But he won't lower his so-called dignity to play what millions of people want. He was too

afraid of what other musicians might think. So I asked myself, *Why not try Iturbi? Maybe he won't be so stuffy.*"

Pasternak stopped pacing up and down in front of me, but his sentences kept spurting out. "At first, Iturbi didn't want any part of it, so I said to him, 'I've got a picture. All I can tell you about it is that in it you'll be able to give all Americans music, not just stiff-necked, stuffed-shirted Americans. You can meet the people half-way. You know what I mean? Also I bet you a piano that your record sales will jump like a cow hurdling the moon.'"

"I've already had one sad experience with the movies,' Iturbi told me. 'I came out here to see a producer, and I sat waiting for him for an hour. Then his secretary told me that Mr. So-and-So was still busy, and gave me a five-cent cigar. I waited another hour, then I went home. If you give me no five-cent cigars and two-hour waits may be we get along.'" Pasternak pronounced the word "maybe" as Iturbi had done, making two separate words of it, with the accent on "be."

Pasternak kept his cigar-puffing virtuoso supplied with Corona-Coronas, and after Iturbi's second picture, Mrs. Pasternak called her husband. "There is a piano in the living room," she said. "Did you order it?"

"Why should I order a piano?" Pasternak asked her. "We already got one."

Then the solution of the mystery came to him. Sales of Iturbi's records had jumped 400 per cent. The pianist was paying off his bet.

Among the films George Sidney has directed are *Anchors Aweigh*, *The Harvey Girls*, *Thousands Cheer*.

He indicated chairs for us and sucked a match flame into a charred pipe bowl. "Jose is as many-faceted as the Koh-i-noor," he said. "He's not only a great musician, he's also a one for flying his own airplane—he has logged seventeen hundred solo hours—and he likes to roar up to your house on a motorcycle too. Just outside of his bedroom door on a sleeping porch hangs a punching bag. He gives that bag stiff, jolting workouts now and then. Says it helps his

co-ordination. If he's your friend, you might as well say good-by to telephone privacy. He'll call you up in the middle of the night from New York, from Caracas, from Havana, from Miami, and say, 'Listen to this little song I've just discovered. It's a Spanish madrigal.' Then he'll play it for you.

"He's as strong as an ox. Once when he was sick, the doctor gave him two injections of a powerful sedative instead of one. He didn't feel them. He has no side or affectation. Charles Boyer gets angry if you don't call him 'Sharl Bwa-yeah.' The crew assigned to Jose's pictures call him 'Hose,' and it's fine with him."

Sidney jabbed his pipestem in my direction. "When we first put him on the screen, we had a hard time convincing him we wanted him just to be himself. In his pictures, Jane Powell, Walter Pidgeon and Kathryn Grayson bear the names of the fictional people they portray, but in the same films Iturbi is always called Iturbi. Our problem was to find out exactly what the inner Iturbi was like—what his essential juices were—and get that real Iturbi on the screen. In his heart, everyone thinks he is really Gable or Cary Grant or Tyrone Power. You think your smile is a big, white, dazzling one, when all the time it is just a twisted smirk. Once in a while we had to correct Jose and say to him reprovingly, 'Iturbi wouldn't do it that way.' When he'd say with some puzzlement, 'But I *am* Iturbi,' we explained to him patiently, 'What we want is not the Iturbi you think you are, but the one you really are.'"

Sidney applied more matches to his pipe. "His house is like a four-alarm fire. One minute he is signing a contract, the next he is tying his grandchildren's hair ribbons. Downstairs are two pianos, back to back. There is a harpsichord on the upstairs landing. There is another piano in his bedroom. Iturbi practices on all of them. Sometimes he dictates letters to his secretary or talks to his grandchildren while he practices. He talks to them in Spanish; to his butler in Italian; to his friend, Movie Director Jean Negulesco, in French.

"I could talk to you about him for hours," Sidney said.

I said that my problem was beginning to shape up as one of

condensation rather than lack of material. He walked to the door with us.

"He's always practicing," he told me. "He practices after concerts and after making a recording. Sometimes he practices all night, poring over scores and keeping his fingers supple.

Lillian Burns' workshop has large spaces between the chairs and the tables, so her pupils will have plenty of room to go through their dramatic paces. She is small and brunet. She gesticulated freely. Before talking to me, she asked Pumphrey if it was all right to tell me about Iturbi's shortcomings as an actor. "I wouldn't want to say anything to hurt him," she said. Pumphrey gave her a green light.

"My job was to let Jose keep every single drop of his own personality, and at the same time make that personality photogenic and presentable," she told me. "Some of his actions and mannerisms on the concert stage seem fine when he does them there, but on the screen they look laughable. The movies have a way of making things look funny that shouldn't be funny."

Lillian Burns ran her hands through her closely cropped hair. She said she'd never forget the sneak preview of Iturbi's first movie, *Thousands Cheer*. "We sat there holding our breath, waiting to see if his personality would project itself from the screen. We knew that personality was there because grown women had almost swooned when he played in concerts; one of them told me Iturbi was a 'masculine turbine,' whatever that is. But we didn't know whether his was a personality movie audiences would respond to. Most artists have heart and emotion when they play their chosen instruments. Luckily for us, Iturbi had them as a person too. When the 'sneak' was over, applause rocked the theater. We knew he was in."

Back in Eddie Lawrence's office, Pumphrey suggested that I see Iturbi's business manager, George Marakas, and that, before I talked to Iturbi himself, I should talk to Iturbi's sister, Ampara, who plays with him in many of his concerts.

Two days later, Marakas dropped in to see me in my hotel room.

I had heard that Iturbi required a special kind of piano. I asked Marakas about that. Iturbi's pianos have a specially keen action and a sensitive and delicate keying, which means that if a key is merely tapped lightly it goes down. The makers of his pianos keep thirty-six pianos stashed away around the world for Iturbi's sole use. Marakas gives the piano manufacturer Iturbi's itinerary, and a piano is shipped to him wherever he is; and it has to be flown to him by plane. The piano company also sends a piano technician—I discovered that a tuner is called that in the upper musical brackets—to accompany Iturbi, take his pianos' temperatures, listen to their heartbeats, and nurse them back to health if they are ailing.

I kept my date with Ampara Iturbi the next morning at her Beverly Hills home. Her eyes were liquid; her voice soft. The battle between Spanish and English waged by her tongue made her words take odd twists and turns. At times she had to grope for a way to tell me what was in her mind.

"How shall I begin?" she asked. I suggested that she might start by telling me the first thing she remembered about her brother. "That would be when I was six," she said, "and he was nine. We used to go to our music lessons together and he protected me from bad, bold boys on the street. Even then he was a little gentleman and like a second father to me. With his few coppers he bought flowers for me from flower women. He was born on November 28, 1895. He started to earn money when he was eight, playing in the Valencia cinema houses and at balls. His pay was five pesetas (about a dollar a week), and he stopped only for the sandwiches my mother sent to him. My father worked in the office of a French gas company. He loved tone, had an ear for pitch and was a wonderful amateur piano tuner.

"After a while we had a teacher named Maria Jordan. My mother thought that Jose didn't practice enough. She said to our teacher, 'Maria, I am afraid Jose is not making progress. He is not practice enough.' Maria looked her in the eye and said, 'I tell you the truth. Your son is a genius. Not only has he played the exercises I gave him perfectly, he is three exercises ahead of me.'"

Ampara said that her brother had been born with an extraordinary gift for sight reading. "When he was twelve he would take an orchestra score and read it as other children read the funny paper," she said. "Do not ask me how he did it."

When he was eleven, Jose began teaching other pupils twice his age. While he was still eleven, his teacher arranged a recital for him. In his first concert he forgot the ending and faked the last bar six times until he remembered the right one. Afterward he went to Barcelona to study with the great concert pianist, Joaquin Malats. When he returned to Valencia, his townspeople raised a subscription of 1400 pesetas to send him to Paris for further study. He was graduated from the conservatory at Paris with first honors when he was seventeen.

"At the start of the first World War, he came to Spain, got married and went to Geneva to teach in the conservatory there," Ampara went on. "That marriage was a very romantic one. His sweetheart was elegant and beautiful. She was playing in cafés and theaters, and he was teaching. She was one of his pupils. Toward the end of their courtship, she was not interested in the lessons, but in my brother."

At the Geneva Conservatory, Iturbi taught the class for virtuosos. Eighty concert pianists were his pupils. "He sat in the same chair Franz Liszt sat in," Ampara said. "He was the first one the conservatory thought was great enough to sit in it since Liszt died."

Iturbi started to give concerts, and his tours were so successful that in 1923 he severed his connections with the Geneva Conservatory. When he left Geneva to go to Paris to begin his career as a concert pianist, twenty-five of his Geneva pupils followed him.

"What more shall I tell you?" Ampara wanted to know. I mentioned that I had heard that it was her brother's habit to keep his fingers moving as if playing scales, even when he was nowhere near a piano.

"I do the same thing," she told me. "It is to gain articulation and control. We have done it so long we don't know when we are

doing it. You might call it"—she chased the phrase around in her mind—"a professional deformation."

I said that her brother's hands and fingers must be very strong. She smiled ruefully. "Sometimes when we are playing together, he pats me on the knee to encourage me. Afterwards that knee is black and blue. He has a grip like a lion."

I wondered if there were any odd bits of information about her brother she hadn't told me.

"There are so many things, my mind is not orderly about them," she said. "He doesn't like big cities. He likes to open his eyes mornings and see right away trees. His wife died eighteen years ago. It was a great tragedy. His daughter died in 1944. He doesn't talk about that. He loves children, especially his two granddaughters, Tonia and Theresa. His affection for them is so great I think it would make him happy to lay his life down for them. This spring he worked for hours helping them build a lemonade stand, so they could play at storekeeping."

It was four days before I walked up the flagstone path to Iturbi's California-Spanish home.

Iturbi had even more trouble with English construction than his sister, although his voice is fully as soft and easy on the ear as hers. When I told him that I had seen his sister, he said, "I am the worst enemy of my sister. I try not to overshadow her, but I do. In my opinion, she ranks absolutely among the first pianists in the world—I would say one of the three finest—yet she never get her just credit because of me. The Columbia Corporation, who handles our concerts, said 'Two pianos—they'll never go.' But for three years now Ampara and I break records in all places. When we played Fort Worth, blocks of tickets were sold to people who live in Gallup, New Mexico, over eight hundred miles away."

I thought of the description someone had applied to him, "short, dark and with an engaging, childlike vivacity." Melvina Pumphrey and Lillian Burns had told me he had "charm." When he smiled, I knew why. In his smile were more than white teeth and lifted eyebrows. There was also a hint of sadness in it. He gave the

impression of walking on tiptoe, and I remembered Ampara had told me, "Between the ages of seventeen and thirty he jump rope, so he can be light on his feet."

"When I am a boy, it was a struggle," Iturbi told me. "I played in movie house sometime from seven-thirty in the morning until two the next morning."

I said that Ampara had told me he was tremendously strong and that I took it for granted that his strength came from constant practice. "I practice slowly the technique on the piano—cleck-clack," he said. "But I develop only the strength of a pianist. The technique is all flexibility and attack, which is like that of a boxer. When I practice, there is no grab or a squeeze in it, and while my fingers and my arms are strong, there is nothing at my wrists. People think my fingers must be all muscle and that I can crack a walnut between my thumb and forefinger. This is not true. I would need a hammer for that."

"I used to play a hundred and eighty-three concerts every year, one year a hundred and ninety-three. If I would do the same thing now I would make from a million, two hundred thousand to a million, three hundred thousand dollars a year." Playing in hospitals has cut the number of his paying concerts from around a hundred and eighty down to fifty or sixty. In one six-months' period he made more than 1000 appearances for hospitalized veterans, although in some of those hospitals the pianos were only four-and-one-half octaves long and his fingers ran off the keyboard into space.

"Half of my energy I give to people who need it badly," he said. "It is not only the loss of lives in the last war but spiritual deaths that makes me do it. Some of the men in the hospitals are both alive and dead. They have great burns on their body and faces. Some of them have no arms and legs. People say to me, 'Why do you play so much in hospitals?' I say, 'Shut up. I do it more.'"

I asked if there had been any repercussions from what one writer called his "Hollywood monkeyshines." He shrugged. "It is not true that because you live with Bach and Beethoven, you must die with them. You should see certain of my colleagues look down their

noses when I start to be with Bing Crosby, Rudy Vallee and George Burns on the radio. Then I go into the movies. A conductor and a violinist I know went to see me in *100 Men and a Girl*. They went away muttering, 'What a shame. Such a beautiful art sold down the river.' Now those two are trying to get into pictures themselves. When I start with boogie-woogie, there are screams from critics that I have disgraced my art. A number of those plush-bottom critics go to my concerts, but during the concerts I notice that boogie-woogie make their plush bottoms wiggle too."

When he started to take piano lessons, at the age of five, Iturbi found himself neck-deep in solfeggio. Solfeggio is the equivalent of grammar in music. It means learning the technical theory of music before coming to grips with the instrument itself. For six months after Iturbi began to study he was not allowed to put finger to key. "Now they stir the whole thing together like applesauce," he said. "Music should be part of the general education, like swimming. Unfortunately, right away they want you to show them a short cut to piano playing. Is like building a house quick. Then after twenty years, you say, 'What is wrong with my house?' and you discover you have forgot the foundation."

Iturbi made his first American concert tour in 1929. His initial appearance in New York was as a guest artist with Stokowski as conductor. Of that appearance he said, "Stokowski stick his neck out for me." He also appeared as a guest artist in a concert conducted by Willem Mengelberg. "I owe my success on my first trip to America to Mengelberg. I had played with him in Europe. When I came to America, he told me, 'Go through the big front door. Don't go through the kitchen door or you are a dead pigeon.' He helped open that front door for me."

I got up to go. I stood looking down on him. Somehow he didn't look short to me. Two sentences of his sister's ran in my mind: "Everything he does, he does not do half and half. . . . Even when he is cleaning a drawer, he does it with all his heart." I knew which drawer it would be. He is strictly a top-drawer man.

9. *Miracle Moppets*

The first Hollywood story I ever wrote had to do with that amazing phenomenon, Shirley Temple. It was during the dimpled darling phrase of Shirley's career. At the time she was the world's baby. I was then an art editor and was trying to bolster what seemed to me an outrageously niggardly salary by free-lancing in my spare moments. I got most of my Shirley material from Mrs. Temple. A highlight of that interview was Mr. Temple's return home from his bank work. He was convulsed with laughter.

"What's so funny?" his wife asked.

It seemed that he had received that very day a letter from a strange lady who thought that with his help she could produce a replica of Shirley. Mrs. Temple was definitely not amused. I begged a few scrawled sketches drawn by their daughter, to use for illustrative purposes and departed.

I gave the story all I had but my all turned out to be too much. It came to eighteen pages. The coeditors of *The Ladies' Home Journal* said that they'd buy it if I'd cut it to one page. I began with a voice that had clipped through a fuzz of slurred static from London to ask Mrs. Temple, "Is it true that your daughter is bald and wears a wig?"

Gertrude Temple had put out a hand to touch the curls set by her own fingers not ten minutes before in the Temple bathroom and had said, "No." She was calm about it. She knew that to any number of people, the legend that was Shirley Temple was sheer black magic. Nunnally Johnson's little girl, Nora, for example, thought

that Shirley Temple had been copied from the Shirley Temple dolls. Out of this inability to accept the miracle as fact had grown the newspaper story, printed in a foreign country, that Shirley was really thirty years old and a dwarf.

Fortunately for her position on the box-office list, those unbelievers were trampled underfoot by the millions to whom she was real in a very personal sense. Although she had recently removed to a new house with a wall around it, she lived in hundreds of thousands of homes. She belonged to millions of parents. She was Public Property No. 1.

Her mother and father were constantly aware of this shared parentage. Letters arrived at the Temple home saying, "We don't like the things you let Shirley do in her last picture. You shouldn't let her do those things." If she lost weight, self-appointed mothers and fathers were pretty stern with Mrs. Temple for not taking more care with her diet or for allowing her to work too hard.

Shirley Temple and the movies were both born on April twenty-third. At the time when I wrote about her the movies were forty-one years old and Shirley was going on nine. The movies are a large industry but Shirley was the largest one-girl industry in the world. She was paid \$75,000 a picture for four pictures a year, and her income from the by-products of her fame was greater than her salary.

Her name was a tremendous business asset. Over fifteen firms paid her royalties for its use. A Shirley Temple license was granted only on her terms. Her parents and lawyers stood for no abuse of the public confidence.

At nine she was a captain of the Texas Rangers, a colonel in the Hawaiian National Guard, a mascot to the Cuban navy. Yearly she received hundreds of presents from every corner of the globe. She rode to her daily chores in a limousine driven by her own chauffeur. The Japanese ambassador called her on the phone and asked her to please speak to his little girl. At the world premiere of Wee Willie Winkie she walked on red plush carpets past hysterical fans to receive a bouquet of roses from Tyrone Power, then went home to bed before the picture was shown.

Even so, it was unfair to call her a lucky star. Lady Luck had waved her wand at Shirley only once: namely, on the occasion when word was passed that a movie director would visit Shirley's school to choose twenty promising peewees to appear in a series of two-reelers. Shirley's mother took a look at the mob waiting to be tapped by fame and started home with her daughter. A block away she hesitated, set her jaw and marched back. Luck may have guided her, but it's also a better-than-even bet that she was guided by dauntless spirit and determination.

A career like Shirley's didn't result from letting George do it—although George is her father's name and he did quite a lot. He supervised her not inconsiderable investments. Gertrude Temple got \$500 a week for watching her daughter emote, and she earned every penny of it. Shirley's lawyer, Lloyd Wright, worked hard as business manager and adviser. Her studio—Twentieth Century-Fox—worked hard. She herself worked hardest of all. Her pictures cost around \$150,000 to make and grossed over \$1,000,000. They frequently finished ahead of schedule.

Hal Roach once had Shirley Temple under contract and let her go to another studio. It was hard to blame him. No one could have foreseen the miracle that was Shirley's. When she was born the doctor had no way of knowing that the celestial script called for him to say, not "It's a girl," but "it's a gold mine."

It was too bad for George Temple's peace of mind that he hadn't. George was a banker and at that point things weren't looking too hot in banking circles. But after Shirley walked away with her first real movie role in her two plump hands, George did all right. While his daughter was progressing from a snack from her mother's lunch basket in a corner of the set to a dressing bungalow on wheels, he went from bank cage to bank manager. In spite of his success, Shirley frequently urged friends to deposit their money in her daddy's bank, as if fearful for its future.

The golden touch did not operate, however, without headaches and repercussions. Unscrupulous gentry advertised her to appear as part of projected entertainments without first securing her permis-

sion. Shop prices were jacked up practically in front of her mother's eyes. If she went to Sunday school, it turned into a "personal appearance." To prevent this, a minister came to her home.

She was the recipient of hundreds of begging letters. Not a week passed but Shirley or her parents received letters from persons claiming direct relationship, especially from people whose name happened to be Temple.

Before she moved to another home, the Temple yard and front porch were continually overrun by tourists and sight-seers maddened by their proximity to "the presence." A watchman patrolled the Temple home night and day, ready to cope with cranks.

Another headache was the question, "Will Shirley make the jump from babyhood to young girlhood without succumbing to the gangly, awkward stage?" The Temples convinced themselves that she would be the exception to the rule. Warner Baxter said, "Shirley will survive that difficult period." David Butler, who directed several of her films, was equally sure. The Temples preferred to believe them right.

They thought that if she did achieve this miracle, it would come about because she was more than cute, more than pert and clever. She had charm and—for a child—amazing talent. Frank Morgan said of her, "She is the greatest actress I have ever played with."

When she was learning a tap routine, she watched Bill Robinson's face as he went through the steps. She didn't watch his feet. She just listened to them. Then, going home from work, she moved her feet in the auto. At night, after 8:30 bedtime, she moved her feet under the covers. By morning she had Bill's routine down cold. Her mind was retentive. Her mother went over the script with her in bed, watching for the things that needed correcting, such as a habit of poking out her lips.

In spite of the fact that her I.Q. is high, she conformed to the pattern from which the little girl next door was cut. She made mud pies and played jacks. She had had the measles. Her first word was "mama." By turns she wanted to be an artist, a vegetable woman or a policewoman when she grew up, just like anyone else.

"Perhaps the answer to the whole thing," I wrote, "lies in a remark of William Seiter: 'She is just a little girl eight years old. She puts on her cloak of talent. Does the things she is supposed to do . . . then takes it off again.'"

Later, when I was no longer an art editor but a staff writer, and when Shirley's legs had grown longer and age had laid its heavy hand on Shirley's shoulder (she was well into her teens), I was told to take another look-see at the Hollywood child-star situation and see what the then current crop of them was like. I decided to single out one and concentrate on her.

Many candidates for the throne from which advancing years had deposed Miss Temple called upon the agents and casting directors of the film industry every day, but few were chosen. The Hollywoods were full of curly-headed tykes with dimples and dancing feet, shooed along by proud mammas. Hourly on the hour the tidal wave of pretenders flowed into the offices of such talent seekers as Gene Mann, of Mann and Smith Agents in Agency Row.

Gene had seen mammas and moppets come and go at the rate of forty or fifty a week for as long as he could remember, and a potential child star had to have something very special to light the fires of interest in his wary eye. His latest white hopelette had more than that, he thought. "She's not another Shirley, any more than there'll be another Pickford or Chaplin. They broke the mold when they made Shirley. Shirley was a personality kid. This new kid, Nona Griffith, I've signed, is not the hopped-up, supercharged type. She's delicate and fragile. She's quiet and sweet. She's got charm." He groped for better adjectives, then gave up. "Brother, what she will do to your heart when some smart producer turns her loose is brutal."

Gene had stumbled across Nona. His wife had met her at a child's party to which Gene's daughter had been asked. She suggested that Mrs. Griffith bring Nona to see her husband. "She sat in that chair you're sitting in, and she didn't move for an hour," Gene told me in awe-struck tones; "maybe an hour and a half.

Generally kids have to be scraped down off the table or corralled with butterfly nets."

"She was being considered for Journey for Margaret at M-G-M when she got her hand caught in a laundry mangle, and it ruined her chances. I've had one part offered her, but it was too small; I turned it down. But she has time. She is only seven and she looks five."

Gene was the agent who handled Shirley when that youthful trouser seized the jack pot in her chubby hands. He had lost Shirley when her parents decided she didn't need an agent any more, but she gave him a reputation for having the golden touch as far as juveniles are concerned.

The reputation was a headache. "Every time an agent gets a kid who can roll her little eyes, he brings her around to see me," he said. "I get at least fifteen calls a week. The Mammias all run true to type. Most of them are frustrated actresses who never got a break, and they see themselves reincarnated in their children. Every other sentence runs, 'I'm not saying this because I'm the child's mother!'"

Not long ago, a mother had given him a terrific build-up about her daughter's remarkable mind. "The way that kid showed me she was a genius," he said wryly, "was to stick her face up into mine and ask, 'Do you like me?' in a loud, clear snarl. The mothers always shrink the age a couple of years. It makes their darlings look smarter."

According to Gene, mothers invariably told him he could keep all the money their children made. They were just interested in the career angle. Gene took that kind of talk with a copious seasoning of salt. "They do the damndest things to their children," he sighed. "I've had kids come in here made up to look like Veronica Lake, peekaboo hair-do and all."

Later I met Nona and her mother. With Gene, I waited for them in the lobby of the Beverly Hills Hotel. When they came through the door, I thought, "*She's not a child at all; she's a pair of eyes, walking.*" Seated around a table, we had a visit. I dis-

covered that Nona's father had been a chartered accountant in England before coming to this country. In Los Angeles he was making a comfortable living as a C.P.A.

Gene pulled out a pack of cigarettes, lit one, then, with mock gravity, asked Nona if she indulged. She fixed him with a reproofing stare. "Little girls shouldn't smoke," she said. "It isn't lady-like." Her voice, as tiny as herself, emerged with a cut-crystal clarity and no babylike slurring of the g's.

I asked what she had been studying in school. "We studied about the Sphinx and the Pyramids," she told me. "I don't see how they could make them without machinery. Do you?" None of us had a ready answer for that. "Also, we studied about iguanas," she went on. "They are very hideous."

"Nona can speak with an English accent," Mrs. Griffith said . . . "Say 'but definitely' for the gentleman, dear."

Nona said, "But def-net-ly." It sounded very British.

"She can cry beautifully," Mrs. Griffith told me. "She is learning to do it with real tears."

As a girl, Mrs. Griffith had attended a London theatrical school called the Italia Conti. A small urchin named Noel Coward and a knobby-kneed child named Gertrude Lawrence were racketing around the place at the time. Mrs. Griffith's first stage appearance had been with C. Aubrey Smith in Daddy Long-Legs. She had played one of the orphans, but had had no lines to say.

It seemed that Nona was reading Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, dividing her time between Christian's journey and a mechanical game. Mrs. Griffith asked her daughter if she remembered reading *Alice in Wonderland*. Nona shook her head.

"Don't you remember, 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves,' dear?" her mother prompted.

"That," said Nona firmly, "is baby talk."

When she was a year and a half old, Nona had recited *The Rubaiyat*, but Mrs. Griffith didn't think its meaning was very clear to her at that age.

Pressed for an opinion of Nona's ability, Mrs. Griffith gave it

serious thought. "I believe she is capable of being a great dramatic actress," she said.

I wondered if she knew how great the chances were against Nona. There's many a slip between a big-eyed little girl trying to get ahead and personal-appearance tours and a house with a swimming pool. But strange things have happened in the never-never land. A Baby Leroy blossomed overnight into a trouper capable of stealing scenes from W. C. Fields, and Jackie Coogan wept his way to fame under a floppy cap.

I talked to Nona and her mother in 1944. To my delight—I was proud of having selected her from all of the would-be Shirley Temples a week Mann was interviewing then—Nona was put under contract in 1946 by Paramount. She appeared in a film called *The Uninvited*, and followed that with a daughter role in *The Perfect Marriage* with David Niven and Loretta Young. At least one reviewer remarked that the children in that movie acted with even more distinction than its adults. When her contract with Paramount expired she travelled throughout Europe with her mother and father. Early in the summer of 1948 she returned to Hollywood and was placed once more under Mann management.

The flood of mammas convoying curly heads "twice as good as Shirley" never seems to lessen in Hollywood. Only now they are not only "twice as good as Shirley," they are "twice as good as Margaret O'Brien."

Last June, I walked past a sound stage door on the R.K.O. lot. Inside, Cary Grant was working in a movie that had involved sending out a call for child extras. Outside the door was a group of middle-aged women, knitting, gossiping, waiting. They were waiting for the children swarming around them in the sun to win a place in another kind of sun—a sun of banked spotlights.

It is a truism in the magazine-article trade that the task of writing is one of the more agonizing and frustrating forms of self-torture. As truisms have a habit of being, this one is true; or so, at least, most article writers feel. A lot of the performers, fresh from their beds of sharpened nails, are cutting quite a dash on the journalism school circuit these days, showing their scars and hoarsely urging the students to switch to something easy like pharmacy or chiropractic. If he were so minded, Pete Martin, who is one of the leading bleeders in the fancy, could scare a whole generation of students away from the typewriter.

Martin wouldn't do this, and is therefore probably a traitor to his calling in the eyes of its more articulate sufferers. Martin's crime is that he actually likes his work, painful though it may be. A large, vigorous man, he squeezes information out of his sources like a playful but determined mastiff shaking the sawdust out of an Atlantic City sofa cushion. In the process, he suffers when the source appears to be suffering and rejoices when the source appears to be rejoicing. This is tough on the emotions, especially when one is dealing with actors, who are experts at this sort of thing. But Martin has been doing this all his life and can take it. (He has long been a frequenter of the tawdry athletic dramas known as track and field meets, and he grunts when the shot is put and yells like a stabbed Afghan when a hurdler trips. He even shoulders a pinball

machine when playing one, meanwhile swearing and cheering, by turns.)

On his return from the controlled chaos known as Hollywood, he has plenty of nervous energy left to set up a controlled chaos of his own. This centers in his office, a fairly large room inhabited by (besides Martin) a large desk, cork push-pin boards, a long work table, a couple of typewriters, a litter of shelled peanuts, cigarettes and candy bars, and a secretary. But before he is through, it has spread to the whole Post establishment. All hands take considerable punishment when Martin settles down to convert his findings into prose.

For days on end, and far into the evenings, he reads out his notes and the secretary transcribes them wearily on her typewriter. His throaty mumblings carry far up the Post corridor, and sound like the serial confessions of a conscience-stricken insurance murderer emanating from the squad room of the 17th Precinct. When he gets down to the actual writing, he blows his top in earnest. He writes lead paragraphs with loud hooks and jabs at his typewriter keys, then, on reading them, crushes them and hurls them across the office angrily. He tries again; then, as the famous expression goes, again and again and again. When he gets one that looks good to him, he comes stamping along the hall looking for someone else's, anyone else's, opinion of it. At this point there is a misty light in his eye which seems to say, "Think well of it if you can, but if you can't, kick it in the groin and I'll try another one."

Throughout the whole long-drawn trail of writing an article, Martin, in a spirit of enlightened masochism, savagely criticizes his own efforts and then roams the corridor seeking the harshest criticisms of others. When a rough draft is completed, he tears it apart, thumbtacks dubious passages on the cork boards, surveys them, groans at them, tears them down and rewrites them. A second rough draft goes through the same desiccating and reassembling process, and this may be repeated many times over, with numerous side forays into adjoining cubicles for criticism. Martin loses poundage, upsets office routine, and perhaps does incalculable

violence to his nervous system, but the end result is a happy one—articles on Hollywood that an adult reader can scan without a feeling of having been surprised in the ladies' dressing room.

The articles in this book are Martin's contribution to arousing a civilized interest in the people who make motion pictures. If his work helps to encourage the more civilized members of the movie industry to make more and more civilized films, that is all to the good. At the very least, it makes for lively and informed reading on a subject that has been dabbed with more irrelevant goo than Wallie and the Duke.

JACK ALEXANDER

